

# ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

Impact of Worksheets Based on Role Plays on Students' Fluency

Milena Munévar Vega

Thesis Director:

Julio César Gómez Ph. D.

Universidad Externado de Colombia

School of Education

Masters' Program in Education with Emphasis on English Didactics

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# ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

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Note of acceptance

Julio César Gómez Ph.D. Thesis Director

Dario Paredes M.A. Juror

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## **Abstract**

This study focuses on the exploration of the impact of worksheets based on role-plays on sixth graders' fluency. Three main theoretical constructs underpinned the current study: materials development, role-plays and fluency. The implementation of the materials took place in a private school in Bogotá, with a group of sixth grade students who were willing to participate. In an attempt to achieve the objective proposed, I implemented four worksheets, following the principles of materials development and gathered data from field notes, audio recordings, a survey, an interview, and students' artifacts. These instruments allowed me to collect the necessary information in a systematic way and thus have a process of data analysis to answer the pondered research question.

The results showed that materials facilitated the creation of role-plays and their performance. Accordingly, some factors, such as partnership and practice for gaining confidence, helped students succeed in this task. The participants developed different levels of fluency, and managed known structures and went beyond incorporating new ones during the creation of their role-plays, while performing them. Additionally, they used the strategies provided by the material to have better fluency and the most relevant, some of them created new strategies to be more efficient in their fluency.

*Keywords:* Materials development, role-plays, fluency

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### **Resumen**

Este estudio está enfocado hacia la exploración del impacto de guías basadas en juego de roles, en la fluidez de estudiantes de sexto grado. Tres constructos teóricos sustentan el presente estudio: desarrollo de materiales, juegos de roles y fluidez. La implementación de los materiales tuvo lugar en un colegio privado del norte de Bogotá, con estudiantes de sexto grado, quienes participaron voluntariamente. Para lograr el objetivo propuesto yo implementé cuatro guías de trabajo, siguiendo los principios de desarrollo de materiales y recopilé datos de las notas de campo, grabaciones de audio, encuesta, entrevista y material de los estudiantes. Estos instrumentos me permitieron recoger la información necesaria de una manera sistemática, y así tener un proceso de análisis de datos para responder la pregunta de investigación establecida. Los resultados mostraron que los materiales facilitaron la creación de los juegos de roles y su presentación. Por consiguiente, algunos factores tales como la colaboración y la práctica para ganar confianza contribuyeron con el éxito de los estudiantes en la realización de esta tarea. Los participantes desarrollaron diferentes niveles de fluidez, manejaron estructuras conocidas, y fueron más allá de las estructuras, no solo durante la creación de los juegos de roles, sino también mientras los presentaban. Adicionalmente, ellos aplicaron las estrategias sugeridas por el material para tener una mejor fluidez, y lo más importante, algunos de ellos crearon nuevas estrategias para ser más eficientes en su fluidez.

*Palabras clave:* Desarrollo de material, juegos de roles, fluidez

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## Introduction

English language learning has become a requirement for people to participate in different contexts of academic, cultural, economic, or social fields, as agents of change and progress. Due to the world interaction trend in the last decades, the Colombian government has promoted educational policies to enquire and support institutions to implement programs aimed at teaching a foreign language, in this case, English. Its intention is to provide citizens, and especially school students, with the essential requirements, such as computer labs, language specialized classrooms, foreign assistants, among others, to fulfill the purpose of becoming competent communicators in the English language. It is the case of the National Bilingual Colombia Program (MEN, 2004), aimed at “having citizens able to communicate in English, with standards internationally comparable; it inserts the country in processes of universal communication, global economy and cultural opening” (para. 3). The response to this ambitious project has been remarkably satisfactory. On the one hand, with the participation of both public and private educational institutions, and on the other hand, with the English teachers' commitment and willingness to attain this purpose.

English as a foreign language learning implies the enhancement of listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills, to allow effective communication with other users of such language. The present study aims at observing the impact of worksheets framed under role-plays to encourage students' fluency. The participants of this study are 6<sup>th</sup> grade students aged 11 to 12, studying at Gimnasio Los Andes, a private school located in Bogotá.

The problem observed revealed the students' need to develop language skills, especially speaking, to interact with their peers and teachers in the school context, and with English



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speaking assistants in the Immersion Program scheduled by the school. In addition, bilingual teaching in the areas of technology, science, physical education, and art privileges speaking skills. According to some students' view, speaking helps them succeed in their academic and personal context. Developing speaking requires time, effort and discipline. The intervention accomplished in this study may offer students effective resources to increase their fluency, and the teacher-researcher's pedagogical growth regarding the teaching of speaking skills in English.

This document comprises five chapters: the first portrays the research problem. The second chapter presents the literature review concerning the theories to support the constructs in my study: materials development, role-plays, and speaking skills (fluency). The third chapter describes the methodological design, the research design, the approach and type of study, data gathering instruments, the instructional design, and the methodological approach. The fourth chapter presents data analysis, and the research categories and subcategories. Finally, chapter five illustrates the research findings, the conclusions and the pedagogical implications.

## Chapter I

### Research Problem

#### Statement of the Problem

Throughout my career as an English teacher, I have had a special interest in helping my students enhance their speaking skills. On the one hand, the students' reluctant attitude towards speaking activities caught my attention; and through my observation, I noticed the urgent need to foster group interaction during the English class sessions as a compulsory activity to increase students' speaking skills. On the other hand, the students have very few opportunities to get involved in spontaneous communicative situations in other contexts out of the classroom.

Along the school year, sixth graders participated in speaking activities, which demanded a more complex level of performance, from informal, simple and controlled, to more challenging, structured and spontaneous ones. Those activities required students to convey messages about different topics, including the practice of communicative functions like answering questions, giving opinions, presenting a topic to the class, or creating and holding conversations.

While performing some of the activities, some students showed anxiety, as they did not understand specific instructions or the purpose of such activities. Along the school events, students participated in exercises in which they needed to put their speaking skills into practice, and communicate ideas that required some proficiency. To do so, while interacting with others, the students had to speak spontaneously, according to the situation assigned. Not all students were able to do it properly. Therefore, this kind of situations gave origin to the present study.

The main concern in this study is to expose students to materials that allow them to enhance and accomplish their fluency in the speaking skill through worksheets based on role-

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plays. To identify and confirm the needs described above, I used a survey, field diary, audio recordings, an interview and students' artifacts as instruments for data collection, which helped me establish the problem to guide the study.

Once I collected data through the instruments abovementioned, I was able to identify the students' perceptions towards the speaking activities, and through the analysis of data, I became aware of the need to enhance students' speaking skills. In addition to the students' different levels of proficiency, their lack of vocabulary and self-confidence when speaking did not allow some of them to convey their ideas while interacting with others during the activities proposed. The previous observations, reflections and statement of the problem gave a basis to the study and the actions to accomplish.

### **Research Question**

How do the development and implementation of worksheets based on role-plays impact sixth grade students' oral fluency?

### **Research Objectives**

**General objective.** To analyze the influence of the implementation of worksheets framed in role-plays on sixth grade students' oral fluency.

**Specific objectives.** a) To assess the level of improvement of fluency in sixth grade students during the implementation of worksheets based on role-plays; b) to observe and describe the students' reactions while working with role-plays.

### **Related Studies**

In an attempt to improve the exploration of the topics concerning this project, I considered some studies related to materials development, role-play and speaking skills. Regarding materials development, Sepúlveda (2009) conducted a study in which he implemented

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materials with visual literacy components to enhance students' speaking skills. He followed the action research framework, and used a survey, field notes and audio/video recordings as data gathering instruments. The participants were fourth semester students from Normal Superior de Gachetá. As a result, this study shaped students' language production after the use of visual literacy-based material. It demonstrated that the material influenced students' speaking skills in a positive way, and improved their oral production. Even though the participants of this study were older, it is important to notice that well-designed material has great benefits on students' learning process.

Likewise, Montaña (2015) conducted a study in which she observed the influence of the activities implemented on students' oral fluency. This qualitative action research study took place in Bogotá with a group of twelve trainee flight attendants who were learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The importance of clear accurate instructions in the materials designed for this study was evident. It allowed learners to accomplish communicative tasks, increase self-confidence and foster communicative strategies. This study sets an important reference for my study, since the proper development of the material defines a good pedagogical implementation. The researcher concluded that recurrent speaking activities increased students' fluency as a positive outcome of proper methodology. On this basis, the worksheets designed in my research study comprised clear instructions and the specific learning strategies for students to gain confidence in the moment of performing the role-plays.

An additional study illustrates role-plays. In this regard, Galindo (2013) worked on a qualitative study whose objective was to reach an effective learning process of English as a foreign language (EFL hereafter) by involving motivation, freedom, teamwork, an effective strategy and a consistent methodology. It included role-plays to fulfill such goal. The researcher

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used field notes, video recording and an interview as instruments for data collection. This study involved ninth graders from a public school in Fontibón, and the findings concluded that there is a more effective learning process when students contribute to the construction of programs. I found this study helpful to mine, regarding the students' involvement through motivation to perform role-plays as a way to enhance teamwork and improve speaking skills.

Rubiano (2013) accomplished a qualitative research study to show improvement of ninth grade students' speaking skills through role-plays in a public school in Bolivar Department where the researcher collected data through questionnaires, students' journals and video recordings while students participated in real-situation settings and pair work as pedagogical activities. The results showed that students improved their speaking skills regarding vocabulary and pronunciation. The researcher found that role-plays promoted collaborative work and interaction among participants. Through this study, I understood how role-plays benefit students' speaking skills by increasing their vocabulary and making them aware of some proper sounds of the language, which in turn, enhances collaborative work.

In another study conducted by Cárdenas and Robayo (2001), students from a public school in Bogotá participated in activities based on role-plays and dramatizations to improve speaking skills. The researchers used the action research as method and observation, questionnaires and videos as data collection instruments. Those elements helped the researchers observe the process, analyze and conclude that role-plays and dramatizations are interesting and a fun way to learn for students and allow them to make progress in their oral production. Based on the analysis of this study, I recognize that students can improve speaking skills through activities similar to the ones I propose in the current study.

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Developing students' speaking skills through role-plays was the aim of a research conducted by Rodríguez (2015). The qualitative approach underpinned that action research study in which the participants were eighth grade students from a public school in Bogotá. The researcher used three instruments to gather the data: video recording, field notes and questionnaires. The findings showed that the use of role-plays enhanced students' speaking skills in a pleasant way, and the material designed caught the attention of the community. The enhancement of this type of activities encouraged students to participate and allowed them to increase their skills. This study is pertinent for my study concerning the constructs, the design of materials for secondary school students, and the positive results of role-plays in an EFL classroom.

In reference to speaking skills, I deemed pertinent to mention Arias (2012) who implemented a pedagogical intervention in a public school to improve third grade students' speaking skills by using communicative games based on visual aids. The researcher used video recordings, interviews, surveys and field notes as instruments for data collection. She used a qualitative approach and case study. At the end of the research process, the author found that students felt highly motivated when using flash cards because they remembered vocabulary associating images; students' participation increased while using communicative games and visual aids. In conclusion, the students expressed their ideas better, by using new vocabulary learned. This research was helpful as I found dynamic ways to improve speaking skills related to the objective of my research: observe the impact of worksheets based on role-plays on students' speaking skills.

Toquica (2010) worked on the enhancement of speaking skills of students in a private university in Bogotá. This study considered the multidimensional approach and multiple

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intelligence instructional-based activities. It was a case study conducted with undergraduate students between 17 and 23 years old, with basic knowledge of English. She used field notes, video-recordings, and interviews as instruments of data collection. This study led to the conclusion that the growth of students' speaking skills relates to their preference to use the contextualized activities, involving topics about the family, professional background, and expectations. Among the micro speaking skills observed in this study, I focused my attention on fluency. The conclusions drawn from this study shed light on the importance of considering the students' interests and learning styles. For this reason, I included specific learning strategies for students to discover the ways to administer their own learning process.

In sum, I identified different ways to enhance speaking skills with students in different contexts, and some common aspects considered by researchers to conduct studies of this nature, incorporating students' context, teamwork, and providing clear instructions, among others. The three constructs presented above underlie the development of this study, and contribute to the improvement of students' English learning process, focused on fluency.

### **Setting**

The context determines the development of a study. The students' conditions, the characteristics of the school, its vision and mission set up in the Institutional Project of Education (PEI, Spanish acronym) ascertain the importance of the study, and its impact on the community. The participants of the current study are sixth grade students who have studied together throughout primary school. It means that most of them are already adapted to the demanding academic level of a private secondary school.

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Gimnasio Los Andes provides intensive EFL education, implementing bilingual teaching in several academic areas such as technology, science, art, and physical education. The students attend eight hours of English, scheduled in four sessions per week in secondary level.

### **Rationale**

The abovementioned institution has declared its intention to become a bilingual school in the future; all the members of the school community are aware of this challenging aspiration, and feel proud of it. There is a clear objective to incorporate the use of the English language in other areas, both in primary and in secondary school, and create a bilingual environment. This is why the use of the foreign language is compulsory, and encouraged by the school principal, coordinators and the school staff in general. The specific concern during the last years has been centered on providing students with significant procedures to make them more competent in the use of English.

As expressed in the official magazine, "Gimnasio Los Andes offers all the students the opportunity of participating in Bilingual learning environments, reaching an independent User level according to the Common European Framework" (Farm, 2015, p. 3.). This is an evidence of the coherent structure of the institutional program to pursue the objective of the bilingual project.

Being a member of this school community is part of students' life project, since they usually remain in the institution from primary level to the end of secondary school. The sense of ownership fosters all personnel, the staff, the teachers, and the students' personal and professional growth. The school is an example of mutual support and partnership in academic processes. Mendoza, the principal of the school, asserted that:



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Since its foundation, Gimnasio Los Andes has developed several strategies to evolve in the pedagogic, methodological and didactic field through three decades of educational work, by fostering projects to improve teachers' practices to link PEI and curriculum to offer life-long education. (2015, p. 6)

Consequently, this study will provide significant strategies, in addition to appealing activities, to help students develop their speaking skills, particularly fluency, through the implementation of role-plays. It may allow students to change their minds and perception about the speaking skills, and become aware of the importance of having a higher level of English to succeed in their academic process and in their performance in different contexts. Furthermore, I expect teachers implementing my proposal to find a way to turn speaking activities development into an exciting experience for their students.

In addition, the current study will contribute to the academic community, regarding the exploration of different means to use role-plays to help students assume a more realistic and positive view of the English class, in contrast with the reluctant traditional perception. Thus, by empowering the students to perform the roles proposed and expand basic situations proposed in each activity designed.

The next chapter portrays the theoretical constructs underlying the current study, regarding the guidelines to succeed in the design and implementation of suitable materials.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

In an attempt to attain the purpose of this research study, I considered three theoretical constructs to plan and accomplish the proposal, suggesting appealing interactive activities that allowed students to work on fluency as focus of the study. Such process was done on basis of the concepts presented for the implementation of the methodological and pedagogical strategies. The next section explains the relation of essential concepts in the view of outstanding authors to illustrate the three theoretical constructs: Materials development, role-play and speaking skills.

#### **Materials Development**

In language teaching practice, it is necessary to adopt new strategies to strengthen students' learning processes. Taking into account the importance of the activities performed during the classes, theorists, teachers, and researchers have worked on the search of new methodological approaches to learn English in a more dynamic style, attempting to include more lively strategies aimed at helping students perceive the learning process as a productive and rewarding prospect.

I deemed prior to define materials development as the core of this study to make it visible, tangible and more effective. Tomlinson (1998) provided a definition of materials development, consisting of “anything which is done by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of language input and to exploit those sources in ways which maximize the likelihood of intake” (p. 2). This definition reflects the intention of any person interested in helping students learn, in any possible way. Núñez and Téllez (2009) preferred to stick to the previous description since it is more inclusive; they also provided a more detailed explanation of what materials development (MD hereafter) means to them:

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Embraces an array of behaviors leading to fostering effective teaching and learning settings. Moreover, it includes the adaptation and/or creation of a learning-teaching exercise, a task, an activity, a lesson, a unit, or a module composed by one or two units. (p. 175)

Bearing in mind Tomlinson's definition, we, teachers, are also participants in this important field that has turned into a tool for the improvement of teaching English. This implies great commitment to pay close attention to what we design and implement in our classrooms; therefore, it can really offer advantages for our students and make them enjoy and learn more from such tasks.

Another insight provided by Tomlinson (2001) allows considering the implications of materials development:

Materials development is both a field of study and a practical undertaking. As a field, it studies the principles and procedures of the design, implementation and evaluation of language teaching materials. As an undertaking, it involves the production, evaluation and adaptation of language teaching material, by teachers for their own classrooms and by materials writers for sale or distribution. (p. 66)

The two previous insights complement one another, since they convey the theoretical and practical aspects considered in this study. Concerning the previous insights, committed teachers' awareness of their role encourages teacher-researchers to become materials developers, as it definitely has an impact on their teaching practice. In this regard, Ramos and Aguirre (2014) mentioned that teachers' teaching practice improves by developing material. Those who face the challenge of having an English class know the importance of the material they use, seeing that it somehow shapes the path the students and teachers follow. Unfortunately, students experience

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lack of motivation due to the use of some textbooks, which do not always meet the students and teachers' expectations, (Núñez & Téllez, 2008). For this reason, teachers play a leading role as materials developers, since they know their classes and their students' needs and interests.

A challenge that teachers face with some textbooks is that the context presented does not fit the students' context and experience. In this regard, Holliday (as cited in McDonough, Shaw & Masuhara, 2003, p. 76) showed particular concern with the "need for methodology to be appropriate to its socio-cultural context, not inappropriately transplanted from a different- and often more privileged- system". It is very common to find textbooks centered on the American or the English culture. Conversely, teachers who are interested in becoming materials developers attempt to design materials involving the students' rural context, as demonstrated in some thesis performed at Externado de Colombia University.

Regarding the aspect previously presented, teachers who identify the problem within the class context can actually come up with some possible solutions. According to Gaies and Bowers (1990), teachers must "equip themselves with the tools for establishing and appropriate methodology that can set realistic national objectives for teacher training and education" (p. 181). The scholars highlighted the role of the teacher as a mediator between the textbook and the students' needs and interests. No matter the textbook, creative teachers may find the solution through proper methodology without contradicting the educational policy of the Colombian Ministry of Education.

However, it does not mean that textbooks are useless to meet learners' needs. The material used in the classroom often needs additional adaptation to the one textbooks intend to provide. That is the reason why the materials developed by teachers usually fit the context in

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which the students are involved. Therefore, they are more pertinent for them. This study aims at designing materials that students can relate to their context easily.

Accordingly, developing materials is imperative to strengthen teaching activities and meet students' learning goals. In this regard, Núñez, Téllez, Castellanos and Ramos (2009) affirmed that two strong reasons to become materials developers concern the stimulation that students receive for learning, inviting them to be an active part of the development of activities. Furthermore, the benefit that teachers gain from this process of creation improves their teaching insights and practices, allowing them to become part of the change. In this way, materials development is positive not only for students, but also for teachers.

Consequently, in Núñez et al. view, the benefits of becoming materials developers are evident when teachers are empowered, students are more motivated, students' needs are taken into account, a context in the material is provided, and theory and practice join in this exercise (Ramos & Aguirre, 2014). Those are the reasons why teachers can have great advantages when developing their material for the classes they have. For sure, it will show good results in not only one but also several aspects of the learning process.

Tomlinson (2003) claimed that MD is a helpful means to let teachers improve their practices and become better teachers. He presented a set of principles of materials development for teachers' professional growth. Among them, he referred to experience, flexibility, challenge, innovation, and reflection, among others. These principles provide teacher-developers with specific features that well-designed materials should have. Despite the demanding conditions to consider, teachers who really want to get involved in MD have a clear idea about the priorities to start creating and adapting materials properly. Regarding this issue, Richards (2010) associates

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MD to reasoning and teachers' experience and goes beyond teaching material itself. The author claimed that

Pedagogical reasoning skills are the special skills that enable language teachers to do the following: (a) analyse potential lesson content (i.e. a piece of realia, a text, an advertisement, a poem, a photo, etc) and identify ways in which it could be used as a teaching resource; (b) to identify specific linguistic goals (i.e. an area of speaking, vocabulary, reading, writing, etc.) that could be developed from the chosen content; (c) to anticipate any problems that might occur and ways of resolving them; (d) to make appropriate decisions about time, sequencing and grouping arrangements, and (e) to develop appropriate instructional tasks as the basis for the lesson. (p. 10, in the preface)

The skills previously mentioned help teachers become more effective materials developers, even those who do not do it in a systematic and formal way. Such abilities allow teachers to use all resources they have at hand wisely, turning each lesson into an opportunity to enhance the students' learning process.

In sum, teachers must be aware of the relevance of using appropriate materials to enhance students' learning process. In this regard, Richards (2010) stated that "the best instructional materials not only serve their (the writer) pedagogical goals, but also hopefully provide the basis for memorable and enjoyable classroom experiences for both teachers and students" (p. 10). In this way, according to the aim of the current study, and bearing in mind the principles and conditions to design effective materials, the students got involved in the learning process to improve fluency are willing to work in a class with a pleasant atmosphere.

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### **Role-Play**

Since this study uses role-plays framed in simulation of real situations, there can be a theoretical confusion between role-play and simulation. To clarify this concept, Van Ments (1987) stated that “role-play is the name given to a particular type of simulation that focuses attention on the interaction of people with others” (p. 24). However, the main difference is that simulation proposes to “think like” and act according to it; the role-play asks a person to “be” another in certain situation and behave as another (Porter, 1987; Van Ments, 1987).

Intending to clarify the abovementioned concept, I selected some insights from Ladousse (2004) indicating that “role-play is one of a whole gamut of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students, which promotes interaction in the classroom, and which increases motivation.” (p. 7) In addition, he pointed out that role-play encourages peer learning and sharing the responsibility for learning between teacher and student. He suggested role-play to be “perhaps the most flexible technique in the range” of communicative techniques, and with suitable and effective role-play exercises, teachers can meet an infinite variety of needs. (p. 7). Role-plays have enormous potential in the classroom that can be explored in order to enrich our students’ learning experience.

Likewise, other authors explain the difference between role-play and simulation more exactly. For Kodotchigova (2002), simulation is a “situation in which students play natural role... that sometimes students have in real life” (Introduction, para. 1). Differently, role-play is a situation in which “the students play a part they do not play in real life” (Introduction, para 1). Despite their slight differences, both are highly beneficial for students and may change the students’ routine considering they are proposed to do something different from what they are used to.

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Having identified differences and similarities, both role-play and simulation have special relevance in this study in which there is an expectation about the students' acting out as a person in a real life situation and in different contexts. In addition, the students sometimes have oral presentations in English as part of the learning process in other areas. All these circumstances foster self-confidence and increase fluency. In the situations described above, it is important for students to be aware of two aspects: how challenging this task is, and how helpful it can be for them to improve their speaking skills. According to Porter (1987), the aim of the role-play is "to train students to deal with unpredictable nature of linguistic communication" (p. 6). Such nature is what students probably feel afraid of, but once they get to feel more comfortable, the progress may be evident.

For the author previously mentioned, a role-play is "when students assume a 'role', they play a part (either their own or somebody else's) in a specific situation. 'Play' means that the role is taken on in a safe environment in which students are as inventive and playful as possible" (p. 5). This means that a role-play allows students to contribute freely to the task proposed, and there is no risk beyond the challenge they can face to succeed. The author also claimed that there is not great difference between role-play and simulation, but mentions that simulations involve wider and more complex situations, while a role-play is simpler and easier to carry out. Regarding these activities, this study proposes elements of both role-play and simulations so it is important to know the corresponding characteristics.

Considering the discussion of the differences and similarities between role-play and simulations, it is pertinent to provide some theoretical basis for the second concept as well. Some authors consider that simulation contributes to speaking skills development. Bygate (1987) used the term simulation to "denote an activity which involves decision-making, in which the



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participants may act as themselves or in social roles. It is not performed for an audience, and the participants work together within the constraints of the imaginary setting” (p. 80). Hence, students/participants have an active role and get involved in a situation previously given.

In a complementary way, role-plays are powerful strategies to engage students in speaking activities, which may ultimately increase their English level and interest towards the class. It is worth knowing its characteristics and implications. Nunan (2005) argued that:

Role- plays are also excellent activities for speaking in the relatively safe environment of the classroom. In a role-play, students are given particular roles in the target language...

Role-plays give learners practice speaking the target language before they must do so in real environment. Simulations are more elaborate than role-plays. In a simulation, props and documents provide a somewhat realistic environment for language practice. (p. 57)

Role-plays become the crucial means to observe the increase of speaking skills for different reasons. Some students refer to speaking skills as one of the most complex to develop, considering that practicing it demands other participants and an environment that fits such purpose. In this sense, Nunan (1991) described how discouraged students can get when they do not have the opportunity to interact in the foreign language; for this reason, the techniques, strategies and activities that the teachers use in the classroom have to be appealing and dynamic to increase the students' language production. The author's insight refers to three aspects: first, the students' need to interact with others; second, the motivation it originates; and third, being aware of the responsibility as teachers to provide the environment to make language production possible.

Furthermore, the teacher has the responsibility to search strategies for students to increase motivation towards learning English. In some cases, motivation arises from the possibility to

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participate in activities that allow students to interact with others and get to practice what they have learned in theory. Even when some young students occasionally feel fearful of speaking, this kind of activities can help them to use knowledge in a more active way. Role-plays respond to the characteristics of the activities that make interaction and motivation possible in an EFL classroom. In what concerns with interaction, Brown (2000) considers that “group work generates interactive language” (p. 178). Besides, group work enhances cooperation and increases motivation and affection. Therefore, students are more willing to participate and interact with peers. This is not a mere class activity as it fosters a positive class atmosphere, mutual support, and strengthens knowledge.

Moreover, Brown and Yule (1983) stated that “the teacher should realize that simply training the students to produce short turns will not automatically yield a student who can perform satisfactorily in long turns” (pp. 19-20). It shows the importance of including more interaction in the speaking activities, keeping in mind that assigning oral presentations do not provide students with enough opportunities to improve their speaking skills. On the contrary, it yields frustration when attempting to speak in the target language. According to the authors’ assertion, role-play implies teacher-researcher and classmates’ commitment to answer my study enquiry.

In the same line of thought, Harmer (2007) defines role-play as “an activity in which students are to imagine themselves in a situation and are given roles to play in that situation” (p. 282). This definition coincides with Baileys’ (2003), while Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins (1999) conceive role-play as part of cooperative learning, which becomes “a vehicle for practicing learning strategies” (p. 106). The authors cited above coincide on the appreciation of the advantages of interactive activities as an effective learning tool to enhance students’

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participation, self- confidence, group cooperation, and knowledge increase. Consequently, they enhance speaking skills development, which is the aim of this study and the third theoretical construct defined in the next part of the literature review.

### **Speaking Skills**

Language as a means of communication implies the integration of four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, according to Brown (2001). The author suggested that when learning a language, teachers cannot exclude any of the language skills. In the natural process of learning the mother tongue, there is a sequence starting with listening, next speaking, afterwards, reading, and finally, writing. Conversely, in the traditional educational system, learners started the process by reading and writing. Nowadays, teachers and learners have paid special attention to speaking skills. This interest has increased in the last decades, since communication has become paramount for people to interact with people from other cultures, and to exchange information and experiences. Despite the interest in developing speaking skills, teachers and learners cannot deny the importance of integrating the four language skills presented in the next section of this chapter.

EFL field requires the development of all language skills. However, to conduct my research, it was necessary to focus my attention on speaking skills. Hughes (2010) argued that “Speaking is the unique form of communication which is the basis of all human relationships and the primary channel for the projection and development of individual identity” (p. 208). Speaking is the path to access other people, cultures and minds; learning how to speak guarantees an approach to others, exchanging thoughts and feelings. It is part of personal growth in relation to other people.

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Several authors defined speaking, classifying it in relation to other abilities. McDonough and Shaw (1993) stated that “speaking is not the oral production of written language, but involves learners in the mastery of a wide range of sub-skills, which added together, constitute an overall competence in the spoken language” (p. 15). Speaking is an ability consisting of different pieces that work together giving the speaker the possibility to communicate. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand speaking theoretically.

In some EFL contexts, speaking has become a priority. For Bygate (1987), it “deserves attention as much as literary skills, in both first and second languages. Our learners often need to be able to speak with confidence in order to carry out many of their most basic transactions” (p. 7). It is evident that speaking helps students in aspects that other skills cannot; for instance, exchanging information with an acquaintance in an oral way or participating in daily activities that require the use of speaking skills. Consequently, its development is mandatory along with the others. Fostering confidence is essential to boost people’s spontaneous interaction when using the language.

As teachers, we permanently face the challenge of teaching our students to speak English and become better communicators in English. This concern led some researchers and authors to reflect and write about such process. Despite the different terms used by the authors, many of them present this skill as very important one to develop in an EFL class.

In contrast with the other skills, speaking is the most complex one due to its nature and the fact that the person you are talking to is waiting for an answer, and a person cannot edit what was said, as you can do while writing. Despite speaking is a natural activity for human beings, accomplishing it in a language different from the mother tongue is not a simple task (Thornbury, 2005, p. 48). Taking into account that this skill is complex and challenging to

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develop, teachers must be aware of the difficulties and the way to approach speaking with the proper tools.

Bailey (2003) proposed the following principles to teach speaking: (a) be aware of the differences between second language and foreign language learning contexts; (b) give students practice with both fluency and accuracy; (c) provide opportunities for students to talk by using group work or pair work, and limiting teacher talk; (d) plan speaking tasks that involve negotiation for meaning; (e) design classroom activities that involve guidance and practice in both transactional and interactional speaking (pp. 54-56).

Regarding speaking skills, according to Harmer they are part of the productive ones. Due to their nature, these skills demand a very active role from students/speakers; they not only require having information, but also using it. Bygate (as cited in Vilímec, 2006) referred to this situation as follows:

In order to achieve a communicative goal through speaking, there are two aspects to be considered – knowledge of the language, and skill in using this knowledge. It is not enough to possess a certain amount of knowledge, but a speaker of the language should be able to use this knowledge in different situations. (p.10)

What Bygate expressed corresponds to a wise perception on how to develop speaking skills by integrating knowledge and practice in a context along with the teachers' methodological guidance. In other words, language knowledge turns into a dynamic interactive process grounded on linguistic principles and learning strategies, involving interaction to accomplish students' successful performance.

Furthermore, in regard to the previous assertion, the proper use of knowledge implies the integration of language skills stated by Brown (2000); thus, teaching grammar itself is

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meaningless. However, teaching grammar in use and context becomes the axis of language construction, as well as learning vocabulary and expressions framed in activities that allow students to feel more comfortable (Bygate, 1987). That is why teachers must go beyond teaching just information, and create the strategies for students to use knowledge in a functional way. It definitely helps them change the concept of English not as a subject, but as a tool to communicate in different situations and express thoughts and feelings.

Therefore, throughout the process of my study, the teaching resources and the learning strategies focused on teaching speaking skills. In this regard, Valdman (1996) mentioned the value of the ability to speak in acquiring language skills. Even when students develop a level of competence in other aspects of the language, such as listening or writing, that converges to emphasize on learning speaking skills. We, teachers, must enhance students' awareness of the development of these abilities to accomplish their learning expectations about speaking skills.

In addition, Brown (2004) presents valuable information about the speaking component of learning a language, in reference to some basic types of speaking, mentioning the taxonomy for oral production. Among others, he included the terms imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive and extensive. For this particular study, interactive speaking and the length of conversations present certain complexity, "which sometimes includes multiple exchanges and/or multiple participants" (p. 141) "and can be assessed through role plays". (p. 167).

Taking into consideration the different conceptions of how to accomplish speaking, I deemed crucial to cite Brown (2007), who stated some micro skills that provided my study with more specific aspects to narrow the observation of how students develop speaking skills during the process of this study. He stated that, on the one side, micro skills refer to producing smaller chunks of language; and, on the other hand, macro skills relate to the production of longer pieces

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of information. These aspects in which, the speaker focuses on are “fluency, discourse, function, style, cohesion, nonverbal communication, and strategic options” (Brown, 2014, p. 142). For the present study, the micro skill to observe in the participants is to “produce fluent speech at different rates of delivery” (Brown, 2007, p. 328).

Furthermore, to clarify some concepts, the same author related speaking skills to oral communication. He highlighted the importance of strategic options for learning English, and then provided some principles for teaching speaking skills. In this sense, oral communication becomes the broader field while speaking skills is a smaller aspect.

In the same line of thought, for Gower, Phillips and Walter (1995), accuracy and fluency are two major categories within speaking. Brown (2007) also considers these aspects, and includes conversational discourse, pronunciation, and affective factors for the teaching of oral communication. All of them equally important when talking about the degree of improvement that students experience when participating in speaking activities. Of course, observing all these factors is complex. Therefore, there is one better observed in comparison with the others.

In regard to my study, fluency requires close observation. For Thornbury (2005), the fact is not speaking fast; although speed is a factor, there are other important aspects as pauses, appropriate placement of pauses, creating strategies, among others. The author summarizes the features as follows: “Pauses may be long but not frequent, pauses are usually filled, pauses occur at meaningful transition point and finally there are long runs of syllables and words between pauses” (p. 8). Fluency as the speaking micro skill selected to develop in my study demands very close attention. However, not only factors like pause, intonation, or speed contribute to improve speaking; the integration of all the components of the language meet to accomplish speaking success to reach a good level of fluency.

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In the same line of thought, using the language with confidence and some level of speed are both evidence of fluency, which Bailey (2003) explained as the “extent to which speakers use the language quickly and confidently, with few hesitations or unnatural pauses, false starts, word searches, etc” (p. 54). In addition, Brown (2007) affirmed that, “fluent speakers can express themselves appropriately and without hesitation. Fluent speakers do not usually worry unduly about making mistakes”. (p. 7). It means that a person who speaks fluently focuses on the message he wants to convey, instead of the formal and correct aspects of the language he uses.

Having explored the contributions of some authors, their concepts provide now a clearer understanding of developing speaking skills and its implications. The articulation of the constructs that underlie the current study represents the strong foundation of the implementation of pedagogical strategies to improve speaking skills through the design and performance of worksheets framed by the use of role-plays, as the aim of this study. The next chapter defines and describes the methodological aspects, procedures, and participants of the study.



## Chapter III

### Methodological Design

#### Research Design

The present study focused on observing the impact that worksheets based on role-plays had on students' fluency development, and how they developed their speaking skills. To accomplish the aim of this research, it was necessary to design and implement class materials to enhance students' role-play performance. In the following paragraphs, I present the research approach and type of study, the participants and the data gathering instruments.

**Approach.** Considering the implications and characteristics of role-plays as an interactive group work tool that requires close observation of the students' participation and behavior, I found qualitative research as the most suitable approach, after reflecting on the components of this study. According to Merriam (1998), "qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5). Preserving the course of the implementation of the study, it guarantees that no additional factor will affect the results observed. In other words, qualitative research allows this factor to become real.

**Type of study.** In reference to the type of study, the suitable one is action research, which, according to Donato (2003), allows teachers to obtain information about their performance and helps them assume their role as leaders in their contexts. It "can inform teachers about their practice and empower them to take leadership roles in their local teaching contexts" (p. 3). This type of study improves teaching practices throughout the research study allowing teacher-researchers to achieve their aims with students' learning experience.

Similarly, Mills (as cited in Donato, 2003), defined action research as:

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Any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. The information is gathered with the goal of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes. (p. 4)

This means that action research allows teacher-researchers to reflect upon their own context. It leads to enrich activities and experiences as part of students' learning process. According to Day (1987), teachers also get benefit as they become "more autonomous, responsible and answerable through action research" (p. 7). Consequently, action research fits the present study, as it intended to observe the students' progress, as part of teacher's success within the process. In addition, Burns (as cited in Donato, 2003, p. 1) suggested the following steps for action research projects: a) explore an issue in teaching or learning; b) identify areas of concern; c) observe how those areas play out in the setting of study; d) discuss how the issue might be addressed; e) collect data to determine the action to be taken (e.g., students' questionnaires, observation reports, journal entries); f) plan strategic actions based on the data to address the issue.

These steps aid the development of the study, as they encompass a systematic process of exploration and selection of an issue of interest related to a problem approached. In this regard, the strategies proposed aim at addressing the issue, and this action allows the researcher to achieve the goals previously set. Additionally, observing and analyzing data arising from the implementations allow suitable interpretations and conclusions. Burns (2003) affirmed that "the aim of qualitative approaches is to offer descriptions, interpretations and clarifications of naturalistic social contexts... qualitative research draws on the data collected by the researcher to

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make sense of the human behavior within the research context” (p. 22). These approaches allow teacher/researchers to understand students’ attitudes, and reactions within the class context, which in some cases, turn into valuable resources to strengthen potential abilities.

Furthermore, action research allows teacher-researchers to transform situations considered as problematic by finding possible solutions. Regarding its general framework, Wallace (1998) claimed that “one of the qualities that we should therefore expect in the strategies that we consider for professional development is that these strategies should help us to turn the problems we face in our professional careers into positive rather than negative experiences” (pp. 4-5). Potential problems may foster creativity for coming up with ideas which can turn into solutions for identified situations, regarding academic issues. However, it depends on personal view and the attitude towards circumstances, which can be approached through action research.

Similarly, Hill and Kerber (as cited in Cohen & Manion, 1985 p. 31) argued that:

Action research functions best when it is co-operative action research. This method of research incorporates the ideas and expectations of all persons involved in the situation...

In education, this activity translates into more practice in research and problem-solving by teachers, administrators, pupils, and certain community personnel, while the quality of teaching and learning is in the process of being improved.

For the argument previously presented, teachers can resort to cooperation from other professionals around to find a more holistic view of the issue to approach. Besides, identifying students’ needs increases teachers’ awareness of unremarkable aspects. Concerning research, Wallace (1998) stated that “Teachers may sense that they are being asked to take on yet more duties in addition to those which already burden them” (p. 17). However, no good results will

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come unless there is an additional effort to make. In this case, framed by the qualitative research principles.

**Participants.** The participants in this study are sixth grade students from Gimnasio Los Andes, a private school in northern Bogotá, and the teacher-researcher playing the role of materials-developer.

In the last years, my specific concern has been to provide students with the tools to reach independent user level according to the Common European Framework. The group consists of 27 students, 15 girls and 12 boys. The students' ages range from 11 to 12 years old.

**Students.** There are no new students in the group and most of them have been in the school for more than 4 years. To select the group of participants, I considered the following factors: a) this group is more likely to miss fewer classes, according to the schedule; b) they work well as a group and are willing to participate in speaking studies, c) the participants were chosen taking as reference the convenience sampling.

According to Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen and Walker (2014), "interviewing the first individuals you encounter on campus, using a large undergraduate class, using the students in your own classroom as a sample, or asking volunteers to be interviewed in survey research are various examples of convenience sampling" (p. 169). It is convenient to have this kind of sampling, considering the limited time we have to conduct research. Additionally, teachers have a special interest in fostering some significant change in the context where we work every day, and improve teaching methodology and students' learning strategies.

Despite the advantages of convenience sampling as the most appropriate in this case, Ary et al. (2014) advised to "be extremely cautious in interpreting the findings and know that you cannot generalize the findings" (p. 169). For this reason, researches that take this kind of

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sampling demand a lot of seriousness, special organization and responsibility to handle every aspect present in it, managing the data collected from these specific participants with honesty, to perform a study with excellent quality.

***Teacher-researcher and materials developer.*** In what concerns with my responsibility, I am a very active participant in the study since I play a triple role, each with specific characteristics. They complement one another and allow the achievement of the objectives proposed in the present study, which entail the observation of fluency as a micro skill in secondary school students through the implementation of worksheets framed within role-plays. The three roles I play (teacher, researcher, and materials developer) are equally important and demanding.

As a teacher, I am responsible for fulfilling the school and curriculum's requirements. For that reason, the topics selected had some relation with the ones proposed for the academic year. In addition to the activities scheduled by the English Department, I need to implement and develop the worksheets based on role-play to enhance speaking skills during the class sessions. As a researcher, I am committed to carry out the research according to the theoretical frame, the corresponding approach and conditions to implement the intervention in an honest and systematic way in regard with the data but also the participants. Finally, the role as a materials developer is the most demanding, since it requires creativity and willingness to step forward a field that involves great responsibility. The class material consists of four worksheets aimed at increasing students' fluency.

**Data gathering instruments.** Due to the nature of the skills to observe throughout the study, the instruments I used to collect data were audio recordings, field notes, an interview, a survey and artifacts.

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**Audio recordings.** Burns (2003) defined audio recording as a “technique for capturing in detail naturalistic interactions and verbatim utterances, used in the classroom they are, thus, very valuable sources of accurate information on patterns of interactional behavior which may not be obvious during the actual teaching process” (p. 94). Audio recordings allow the researcher to review some aspects recorded during the implementation of some material, in this case role-play worksheets. Having a record of the students’ oral performance allows the researcher to listen to recordings several times and assess individual and group performance. This activity requires time and effort, but guarantees close observation of students’ progress. In addition, it is an effective instrument to attain the objective of the study.

**Field notes.** Another instrument I used to collect data was field notes, which according to Lankshear and Knobel (2004) “comprise finely detailed written account of what was observed” (p. 229). They provide a series of recommendations for successfully use this data-gathering instrument. In the present study, observation has to be systematic since it focuses attention and records on what students said, the way they said it, and the implications it has for the analysis of the data and the fulfillment of the objectives.

**Interview.** In what concerns to this instrument, Lankshear and Knobel (2004) stated that “interviews are planned, prearranged interactions between two or more people, where one person is responsible for asking questions pertaining to a particular theme or topic of formal interest and the other (or others) are responsible for responding to these questions” (p. 198). In this case, the interviewer is the teacher-researcher, and the interviewees are the students who participated in the implementation. They also expressed the importance of this instrument when it is not possible to obtain certain information through observation or artifact collection. (p. 198)

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The interview is appropriate for this study, considering that it centers on speaking and the artifacts would not show the most relevant information about students' speaking skills. Data gathering is such an important part in the implementation of the process because it requires special attention regarding all the details. According to the authors mentioned above, the collection of data is a very serious and demanding task, which requires energy, time, and resources. For this reason, teacher-researchers must pay attention to its design, planning and implementation. In my study, I implemented the interview at the end of the process with the objective of collecting information about students' perceptions and learning experience and the impact of role-play materials on their fluency.

### **Instructional Design**

The current study aims at alleviating the challenge that students from a secondary school in Bogotá face when working on speaking skills. To observe the impact of role-plays on sixth grade students' fluency, I designed six worksheets based on role-plays, bearing in mind the level of complexity that students perceived in speaking activities; it was worthy to observe their performance during the implementation of the worksheets.

**Pedagogical intervention.** The pedagogical intervention of my study involved the development and implementation of worksheets containing role-play activities to foster fluency in students from sixth grade. During the implementation of the worksheets, students had the opportunity to face different activities as a previous practice for the actual role-play, which consisted of situations that they could experience in real life in an English-speaking country or with native speakers.

Progressively, the material exposed students to vocabulary and useful expressions in given situations, and with different characters. This allowed them to become familiar not only

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with the topic proposed, but also to the way they could approach the speaking exercise. Students also listened to recordings that recreated similar situations in which they would be involved; this helped them recognize the way to accomplish several tasks proposed in the worksheets as well. In the actual role-play phases, students assumed certain roles corresponding to a character with a task to develop, such as deciding on a gift for a friend, and buying such item.

As part of the materials development, the design of the worksheets aims at fulfilling expectations about the students' progress in relation to the use of vocabulary, intonation, pauses, speed. That is the reason why it is relevant to rely on some theory related to this aspect of the study. Teachers have a serious commitment to improve the learning process of their students, and designing material is one of the most appropriate options. In this regard, Tomlinson (2011) affirmed that teachers' intention is to "increase the learner's knowledge and/or experience of the language" (p. 2). Such experience will help students improve the use of the language and consequently the learning process will be more effective.

Regarding MD, Graves (2000) mentioned that it "is the planning process by which a teacher creates units and lessons within those units to carry out the objectives of the course. In a sense, it is the process of making your syllabus more and more specific" (p. 149). It reveals teachers' desire to personalize the learning experience for students. Hence, they intend to create or adapt material to make students' learning more meaningful.

Furthermore, Tomlinson (2003) set some Second Language Acquisition (SLA henceforth) principles, which are paramount to support students' learning process, enhance self-confidence, motivation, and awareness of their own progress; and to help teachers design meaningful and effective class materials to "achieve impact through novelty, variety, attractive presentation, and appealing content" (as cited in Núñez, Tellez, Castellanos & Ramos, 2009 p.



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43). This principle allows teachers to foster an appealing and relaxing class atmosphere by turning monotonous class routines into motivating involving activities. I made sure that the design and implementations of the worksheets have a positive impact.

Furthermore, the scholars declared that “materials should expose the learners to language in authentic use” (p. 20). In contrast, teachers tend to design and adapt routinary class materials. Therefore, instead of motivating, they lower the students' level of interest. Another principle considered in this study concerns materials fitting learning styles. Tomlinson (2003) classified learning styles as “visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, studial, experiential, analytic, global, dependent or independent” (p. 20).

The last principle to consider emphasizes that “materials should provide opportunities for outcome feedback (i.e., feedback on the effectiveness of the learner in achieving communication objectives rather than just feedback on the accuracy of the output)” (p. 21). Since the activities proposed in my study should lead students to fulfill specific communicative objectives, it is prior for them to receive feedback in what concerns to communicative functions to convey a message, accuracy, and oral performance. As feedback is a source of learning, it is convenient to provide group correction to conclude each class activity and make students aware of the way to correct their own mistakes as a source of learning, instead of noticing what they did wrong.

Regarding the previous principle, “materials should provide the learners with opportunities to use the target language to achieve communicative purposes” (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 21). The previous principle aims at assigning students an active role by encouraging them to use language more spontaneously. Students themselves are not always willing to use the target language in the classes; instead, they prefer to wait until the teacher asks them to do so. The

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materials we use should offer more opportunities for students to reach the goals previously set. In this way, they will become an active part of their learning process.

Likewise, local authors emphasize the importance of MD. Núñez, Pineda, and Téllez (2004) emphasized on recalling previous knowledge; having in mind the type of interaction to promote with the use of materials; and the importance of fostering individual, pair and group work, contextualizing the content of the materials. Furthermore, visual layout is a significant characteristic to attract students' attention. After performing class activities accompanied with contextualized well-designed materials, the outcome of the process is rewarding for both the teacher and the students.

**Instructional objectives.** The main objective of the current study was to design and implement worksheets based on role-plays to help sixth graders develop their macro and micro speaking skills in English. In addition to the main aim, I set three specific objectives: a) to promote a stress-free learning environment for students to enhance their speaking skills; b) to provide students with activities involving role-plays to engage them in practice, and c) to foster a positive perception of students towards speaking activities.

**Intervention as innovation.** Innovation is a key component of transformation to accomplish successful studies. Students not only enjoy activities that show to be different from the traditional ones; they are more willing to learn by performing innovative ones. My intervention will be highly beneficial for students to the extent that the activities included can be new for them, taking advantage of their specific context and interests.

For some decades now, innovation has become a concern for teachers and other agents in education. Exploring the theory allows us to understand the concept of innovation and have the appropriate innovative basis for the development of our own research studies. The definition that

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this study adheres to is provided by Markee (2001), who conceived it as “proposals for qualitative change in pedagogical material, approaches, and values that are perceived as new by individuals who comprise a formal (language) education system” (p. 120). This newness turns into the transformation that the developers of educational studies must pursue to contribute to significant change in the students' learning processes.

In light of Nuñez, Téllez and Castellanos (2012), “MD constitutes a true resource for teachers to respond to students' needs and foster institutional innovation in language teaching ....” (p. 25). This assertion coincides with the SLA principles previously mentioned, and the aim of the survey conducted to analyze the students' needs and interests. In the same line of thought, Núñez et al. (2012) contended:

Teacher innovations in MD foster changes in their roles as they gradually become less passive users of knowledge and more active agents involved in its design. In other words, they begin to make decisions that are based on their students' needs and their understanding of how teaching and learning should be addressed rather than simply meeting the requirements of a course syllabus. (pp. 24-25)

Likewise, the scholars highlighted innovation as a means to meet students' academic needs and increase motivation. Therefore, innovating promotes students and teachers' growth, and institutional success.

Being aware of my responsibility as an agent of transformation and change, the design of six contextualized formal worksheets based on role-plays was the starting point of innovation to encourage group interaction and cooperation as a strategy to improve the students' speaking fluency. Besides enhancing the students' meaningful learning, the study fostered personal growth and positive attitudes in the group. In contrast to traditional role-play activities, the content of the

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worksheets aimed at meeting my students' needs and interests. When students mechanize role-plays selected from a book, they just memorize a script without responding to their expectations. Instead, through the implementation of contextualized worksheets, the students have the opportunity to interact with their peers and rehearse the role assigned.

**Theory of the nature of language and language learning.** For this study, the functional perspective is pertinent due to the nature of the activities proposed. The focus of this perspective is language to do things. Tudor highlighted how Hymes (as cited in Tudor, 2001) "situates language in its social context as the medium by which members of a speech community express concepts, perceptions and values which have significance to them as members of this community" (p. 57). Students in our community must know and feel that they are learning not for a merely component in the curriculum; instead, they are aware of learning how to use English for communicating and exchanging ideas with others, from the same context or different ones.

An EFL program relying on the functional approach focuses on what the users can do with the language and the realistic purposes that they can fulfil while facing specific communicative situations. Such situations associate to academic or professional tasks. In this sense, Richards and Rodgers (2001) asserted that "language is a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning" (p. 21). It means that the main goal of the language is communicating meaning.

The school where I implemented my study, Gimnasio Los Andes, relies on the functional view of the language. It is a rule to foster students' communicative skills since frequent interaction demands the development of communicative competence during the classes and during the institutional events. That is why it is important to implement studies to enhance such approach. In the last years, the institution has increased the efforts by teachers to improve their

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English language level, and their methodological performance. It is evident that the school and some teachers favor the functional view of the language as it corresponds, according to the Educational Policies of the country, which promotes the use of language for communicational purposes.

The vision of language learning that the present study attaches to is the experiential learning, which emphasizes communicative purposes when teaching a language. Two aspects that it highlights are: a) permanent exposure to significant quantity of input in the language; and b) constant use of the language for communicative purposes (Tudor, 2001). Due to the nature of the implementation proposed, it is crucial for students to experience the language in contexts where they feel they are using it with a specific purpose, not only to learn some formal aspects of the language.

**Methodological approach underlying the pedagogical intervention.** From Brown's (2000) perspective, going beyond teaching grammar and the formal aspects of language is a challenge; and genuine and spontaneous communication is one of the ways to teach students (p. 266). Accordingly, the approach that underlies the pedagogical intervention of this study is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This approach emerged from the idea to justify that people learn by interacting. In consequence, group interaction became a need to be met in classroom activities. Bailey (2003) affirms that there are two versions of communicative language teaching: "The weak version says teachers should teach the components of language but include communication activities. The strong version says since students learn through interacting, lessons should consist of opportunities to communicate in the target language" (p. 50)

In this regard, other authors attempted to define this approach (Sauvignon, 1983; Breen & Candlin, 1980; Widdowson, 1978). Brown (2000) synthesized it by stating four characteristics:

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a) All the components of communication have to be the focus of the purposes in the classroom, not only the linguistic competences; b) Language techniques aim at involving in the functional use of the language, which has to direct to meaningful purposes; c) Both fluency and accuracy complement communication techniques, but fluency helps learners to engage; d) It is necessary for students to receive and produce-use the language in an improvised way; that is, not rehearsing.

Richards and Rodgers (1986) also emphasized the following characteristics of CLT: the importance of communicative competence, contextualization, effective communication, teacher motivation, fluency, interaction and intrinsic motivation, among other factors. (p. 67). These characteristics harmonize with the goals set in the implementation of the worksheets. Then, students are encouraged to interact while developing speaking skills and communicative competence, which, according to Hymes (1971), is a main goal for learners.

**Connection of the pedagogical intervention with the research question.** The instructional design shows the connection with the research question, which refers to the development and implementation of worksheets based on role-plays to observe their impact on a macro and a micro skill in students from 6<sup>th</sup> grade. This relation consists of the components underlying the method and approach selected and the desired improvement to be observed in the students. Elements such as the productive role that the students assume are important. As Breen and Candlin (1980) expressed, “the implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an independent way” (p. 110).

### **Instructional phases.**

***Material development framework.*** Based on their experience in the field of MD, Núñez, et al. (2009) provided some recommendations for novice materials developers. They suggested

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

some stages to succeed in MD: a) carrying out a needs assessment-analysis; b) developing the material: anything that teachers can do (creating or adapting); c) revising and evaluating the material, piloting the material, and making adjustments (p. 28). In the view of the authors, this is the way to accompany and guide students through the learning process. With no doubt, teachers whose aim is to enhance their students' learning should start working intensively in the development of material, which enriches students' academic life and teachers' professional experience.

***Informed consent.*** This study follows the systematic process that research requires, and the informed consent is necessary for formalizing the participation in this case of the students. Since their age ranges between 11 and 12, not only they but also their parents signed the informed consent in which they agreed with all the implementation of the material and the development of the study.

***Sensitization.*** Before I started the process of implementation, I presented the study and its objectives to the students, and explained the concept and characteristics of role-plays as a technique developed to enhance their speaking skills. Besides, I presented a general view of the activities to carry out.

***Implementation of the materials.*** Having completed the previous stages, I proceeded with the implementation, by presenting the topics to work on and the worksheets to the students, and finally guiding them in each part of the process. The main part of each session was the role-play, in which every student finally used vocabulary, expressions, examples and ideas to observe the impact of the worksheets on their fluency (micro skill).

### **Sample of workshop**

## WORKSHEET N°2

# RUN INTO A FRIEND

### GENERAL OBJECTIVE:

- To interact with a friend that you run into

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

- To react about running across a friend
- To exchange information about activities



### ROLES:

- 2 friends who run into each other / then talk by phone

1

## GETTING FAMILIAR...

\*Run into: Encounter a person by chance or coincidence

- A. Rank the level of friendship using the words from the blue box. Write them on the lines at each point of the star:

Close friends  
Acquaintances  
Best Friends  
Friends  
Good friends



Learning Strategy - Rank by levels (how close persons are to you).

- B. Answer the questions:

1. Define: Who is a friend? Who is an acquaintance?

✓ A friend is \_\_\_\_\_

✓ An acquaintance is \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you remember a person that you lost contact with? Who?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you like to contact people by phone?

\_\_\_\_\_



**Learning Strategy:** - Personalize the information according to your context or experience.

C. Write a person's name who is/was your...

Best friend \_\_\_\_\_

Close friend \_\_\_\_\_

Friend \_\_\_\_\_

Neighbor \_\_\_\_\_

Acquaintance \_\_\_\_\_

Classmate \_\_\_\_\_

D. Ask your partner about the person that he/she remembers the most and why. Write your partner's answer: Which friend do you remember a lot?

\_\_\_The person that \_\_\_\_\_ remembers the most is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

E. Think of a person that you remember a lot. What is the first thing that you remember about him/her?

\_\_\_\_\_

F. Imagine that you run into that person on the street. How would you feel? Mark with an X

\_\_\_ Curious  
\_\_\_ Happy  
\_\_\_ Surprised

\_\_\_ Excited  
\_\_\_ Interested  
\_\_\_ Intimidated

\_\_\_ Embarrassed  
\_\_\_ Annoyed  
\_\_\_ other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2

### RUN INTO A FRIEND

Work in pairs



### Fluency Strategy

Use fillers: They are words that give you time to think: **wow, well, exactly, sure.**

A. Read this conversation with a partner and then switch places

A: Hey, Jhon, how are you doing?  
B: Hello, It's great to see you. What are you up to?  
A: I'm hanging out with friends.  
B: Ok. How is everything going?  
A: Not bad. **Wow**, I haven't seen you for some time.  
B: **Exactly**. I know...  
A: I'm on my way to the cinema... I'm in a rush  
A: Alright. **Well**, let's keep in touch these days  
B: **Sure**. Call/write me anytime you want  
A: I changed my cellphone number. Register it!  
B: Wait a sec... ok  
A: It's \_\_\_\_\_  
B: Ok. I'll call soon  
B: I'll be waiting...  
A: Of course, bye. I've gotta go too. Bye

#### USEFUL EXPRESSIONS:

**How are you doing?**

**What are you up to?**

**How's everything going?**

**I'm in a rush**

**Let's keep in touch**

**I've gotta go**

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

**B. Practice these expressions with your partner, asking and answering them as fast as you can. Switch places (a-b/b-a). Register your time**

How are you doing?	—————>	Just fine / so so	TIME: 1 <sup>st</sup> (a-b) _____ 1 <sup>st</sup> (b-a) _____ 2 <sup>nd</sup> (a-b) _____ 2 <sup>nd</sup> (b-a) _____
What are you up to?	—————>	Not much, just relaxing	
How's everything going?	—————>	Great / Awesome	
I'm in a rush	—————>	Don't worry / ok.	
I've gotta go	—————>	Ok. Let's keep in touch	

**C. Practice and personalize.** Practice a couple of times the conversation from page 2 until you feel comfortable with the expressions. Practice different ways of asking and answering, adapting the information to your case. Use the fillers in orange and the expressions in purple.

**D. Work in pairs.** Check these role play cards related to two friends who run into each other on the street.

**Let's play a role...**

**Learning Strategy:** Adjust or approximate the message by omitting some items of information, make ideas simpler or less precise, or say something slightly different that means almost the same thing.

1. Call the other person's attention
2. Answer and point out how long you haven't seen each other
3. Propose to keep in touch
4. Register the cellphone number and promise to call. Say good bye

- A. Show surprise and ask how the person is doing
- B. Agree on the comment. Say where you're going and say you're late/in a rush
- C. Agree and give your telephone number
- D. Say you would like to talk. Say good bye.





### E. Create a script for the conversation

**Learning Strategy:** Recombine the elements in new ways to produce a longer sequence, as in linking one phrase with another in a whole sentence.

- Use the role play cards to and other elements (conversation sample, fillers, expressions, etc.) to create your own conversation. You can include the variations that you want.

1.	_____
	_____
2.	_____
	_____
3.	_____
	_____
4.	_____
	_____

A.	_____
	_____
B.	_____
	_____
C.	_____
	_____
D.	_____
	_____

### F. Get ready to record your role play.

**Learning Strategy:** - Repeat the conversation over and over to internalize it.

**Write the key words** that you will use to remember the idea of each part of the conversation.



1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____

A.	_____
B.	_____
C.	_____
D.	_____
E.	_____

**G. Record a first version of your conversation without reading it. Make sure to talk about all the aspects planned. Write the seconds that the conversation took:** \_\_\_\_\_

**H. After practicing the conversation more times, record you final version. Write the seconds that the conversation took:**

\_\_\_\_\_



## GETTING IN TOUCH

**Learning Strategy:** Complete the information taking into account any given clue.

A. When we get in touch again with a person, we talk about many things. Complete the chart taking into account the category, question or answer.

CATEGORY	QUESTION	ANSWER
	How is your family?	
		I'm studying at a bilingual school
	Do you still play/practice...?	
Vacations	Where did you go last vacations?	
Experiences in common		We shared a trip / class

B. Read these questions and ask your partner to answer them as quickly as possible in different ways. Write his/her answers.

How is your day going? \_\_\_\_\_  
How are you doing? \_\_\_\_\_  
What are you up to? \_\_\_\_\_  
How have you been? \_\_\_\_\_

### Fluency Strategy



Use fillers: They are (groups of) words that give you time to think:  
Tell me something,      You see...      By the way  
To be honest      You know...      Don't tell me...

C. **Work in pairs.** Check these role play cards related to two friends talking by phone days after running into on the street.

**Let's play a role...**

1. Greet the person
2. Ask about the person's activities
3. Talk about your activities
4. Answer the questions and propose to share some activity

- A. Show you're happy to talk
- B. Talk about some activities you have been doing. Ask the questions back
- C. Ask about his/her family or friends in common
- D. Agree and plan to meet



## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY



**Learning Strategy:** Adjust or approximate the message by omitting some items of information, make ideas simpler or less precise, or say something slightly different that means almost the same thing.

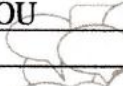
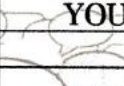

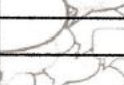
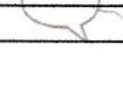
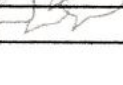

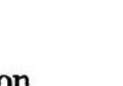
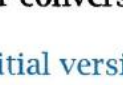
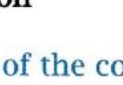
D. In pairs plan your script of the role play where you call a person that you run into with some days ago. Use as many **fillers** and expressions as possible. Include the variations that you want.

1.	_____
	_____
2.	_____
	_____
3.	_____
	_____
4.	_____
	_____

A.	_____
	_____
B.	_____
	_____
C.	_____
	_____
D.	_____
	_____

E. Get ready to present your role play.

Write the key words that you will use to remember the idea of each part of the conversation.

YOU	YOUR FRIEND
	
	
	
	
	

F. Role Play

- Role play your conversation
- Record the initial version of the conversation. Write the time it took: \_\_\_\_\_
- Record your final version. Write the time it took: \_\_\_\_\_

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

### REFLECTING ON MY LEARNING

Along the activities, I could...	Yes	Needs improvement
Relate the topics with my own life and experiences		
Use the (new) vocabulary according to the situation		
Adapt the examples, vocabulary and expressions to my purpose		
Develop the role plays with my partner and speak with my partner...		
a. Clearly		
b. Fluently		
With the practice:		
I spoke faster than at the beginning		
I was aware of what I was expressing		
Use the learning strategies suggested		

### REFLEXIONANDO EN MI APRENDIZAJE

A lo largo de los ejercicios, pude...	Si	Necesita mejorar
Relacionar los temas con mi propia información		
Usar el (nuevo) vocabulario de acuerdo a la situación		
Adaptar los ejemplos, vocabulario y expresiones a mi propósito		
Desarrollar los juegos de rol y hablar con mi compañero...		
a. claramente		
b. fluidamente		
Con la práctica:		
Hablé más rápido que al principio		
Fui consciente de lo que estaba expresando		
Usar las estrategias de aprendizaje sugeridas		

### SELF ASSESSMENT FORM

Evaluate from 1 to 5 how effective you consider every aspect. Five (5) is the highest and 1 the lowest.

Aspect	Criteria	1-5	How can it improve?
<b>Worksheets (Material)</b>	<i>-The material has connection with my reality ____</i> <i>-The activities gave me the opportunity to prepare myself for the role plays ____</i> <i>-The material provides me with learning opportunities ____</i> <i>-The material is interesting and motivating ____</i> <i>-The material is appropriate for my English level ____</i> <i>-The instructions are clear and easy to follow</i> <i>-The sequence in the material moves from the easiest to the most complex ____</i> <i>-The vocabulary, expressions and examples are pertinent for</i>		



## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

	<i>the objective ____</i> <i>-The material has an attractive design ____</i> <i>-The material presents useful content ____</i> <i>-The material has connection with the development of speaking skills ____</i> <i>-The material offers variety of exercises ____</i>		
<b>Role Play</b>	<i>-The role plays helped improve my speaking skills ____</i> <i>-They helped me reach some confidence when speaking ____</i> <i>-The process helped me perform a good role play ____</i> <i>-I applied the vocabulary and expressions in the role plays __</i> <i>-I liked to participate in the role play activities ____</i>		
<b>Speaking skills</b>	<i>-Along the process, I feel that there was a good work regarding my speaking skills ____</i> <i>-The material and activities helped me become more fluent __</i> <i>-The repetition helped me become more fluent while performing the role play ____</i> <i>-I could become more fluent by using the fluency strategies</i>		

Evalúa de 1 a 5 cuán efectivo consideras cada aspecto. 5 es mayor y 1 el menor.

Aspecto	Criterio	1-5	¿Cómo puede mejorar?
<b>Talleres (Material)</b>	<i>-El material tiene conexión con mi realidad ____</i> <i>-Las actividades me dieron la oportunidad de prepararme antes para los juegos de rol ____</i> <i>-El material me brinda oportunidades de aprendizaje ____</i> <i>-El material es interesante y motivante ____</i> <i>-El material es apropiado para mi nivel de inglés ____</i> <i>-Las instrucciones son claras y fáciles de seguir ____</i> <i>-La secuencia en el material va de lo más fácil a lo más complejo</i> <i>-El vocabulario, expresiones y ejemplos son pertinentes para el objetivo ____</i> <i>-El material tiene un diseño atractivo ____</i> <i>-El material presenta un contenido útil ____</i> <i>-El material tiene conexión con el desarrollo de habilidades orales ____</i> <i>-El material ofrece variedad de ejercicios ____</i>		
<b>Juegos de rol</b>	<i>-Los juegos de rol me ayudaron a mejorar mis habilidades orales ____</i> <i>-Me ayudaron alcanzar algo de confianza al hablar ____</i> <i>-El proceso me ayudó a presentar un buen juego de rol ____</i> <i>-Aplicué el vocabulario y expresiones en los juegos de rol ____</i> <i>-Me gustó participar en las actividades de juegos de rol ____</i>		
<b>Habilidades orales</b>	<i>-A través del proceso, siento hubo un buen trabajo con respecto a mis habilidades orales ____</i> <i>-El material y las actividades me ayudaron a ser más fluido __</i> <i>-La repetición me ayudó a ser más fluido al presentar mi juego de rol ____</i> <i>-Pude ser más fluido usando las estrategias de fluidez ____</i>		

Images selected and adapted from:

[https://www.google.com/search?newwindow=1&espv=2&biw=1366&bih=667&tbm=isch&sas1&q=speaking+cartoon+images+mouths+talking&oeq=speaking+cartoon+images+mouths+talking&as\\_l=img\\_3\\_90319\\_9968\\_0\\_100644\\_39\\_29\\_6\\_0\\_0\\_757\\_4700\\_046149211\\_16\\_0...0...1p\\_1.64/img\\_18\\_2\\_171\\_030k10510k1\\_0q2sJ562-4#imgcr=Nwh331rYWW/EluMP63A](https://www.google.com/search?newwindow=1&espv=2&biw=1366&bih=667&tbm=isch&sas1&q=speaking+cartoon+images+mouths+talking&oeq=speaking+cartoon+images+mouths+talking&as_l=img_3_90319_9968_0_100644_39_29_6_0_0_757_4700_046149211_16_0...0...1p_1.64/img_18_2_171_030k10510k1_0q2sJ562-4#imgcr=Nwh331rYWW/EluMP63A)

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

In the present chapter I presented the methodological design and the instructional design which gave the basis to develop an appropriate process in terms of the research related to the implementation stage. In the next chapter, I present the data analysis and for the results, the categories and subcategories that emerged from the interpretation of the data collected through the instruments applied.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Data Analysis Procedure**

This chapter describes the procedure followed in data analysis: the qualitative analysis approach and the steps to identify the impact of worksheets based on role-plays on students' fluency during the implementation phase of this study. It also presents the categories emerged from data analysis and it provides supporting evidence selected from the instruments used in this study. I adopted the grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss (2012), which yields the theory based on the data. Corbin, Strauss and Strauss (2014) stated that the grounded approach "allows for identification of general concepts, the development of theoretical explanations that reach beyond the known" (p. 6). Based on the previous authors' concepts, "in this methodology, theory may be generated initially from the data" (p. 273). Through this procedure, I formalized main categories supported by arguments, and afterwards conceptualized findings.

In the case of the current study, the instruments for data collection in the methodological design were field notes, audio recordings, a survey, an interview and artifacts, which enriched data collected and analysis. The last information concerns Corbin and Strauss' (2014) assertion: "Any type of written, observed, or recorded material can be used, including videos, journals, diaries" (p. 7). Consequently, what the researcher observes turns into valuable source of information and support to analyze the course of the process throughout the research.

In this study, there was not a previous hypothesis established, which is a principle of grounded approach. As Glasser and Strauss (2067) highlighted, it generates theory, opposing the logics of coming up with a hypothesis and trying to verify it. The research process led to the conclusions supported and validated by theory.

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

The process of analysis started by the identification of some patterns and important aspects provided in the field notes, to determine some preliminary categories, followed by the transcription of the audio recordings (role-plays) and using the conversation planned by students in the artifacts as base. Subsequently, I systematized the survey conducted with participants, and interpreted it, confirming the previous categories and noticing emerging ones. Additionally, I transcribed and analyzed the students' interview. I used the color coding technique which, according to Taylor and Renner (2003), consists of “giving each theme a different color, keep notes of emerging ideas or patterns and how you are interpreting the data” (p. 6). I completed charts for each instrument, and added the corresponding evidence highlighting the strength of emerging categories, and assigning names. I followed this technique, which “uses colored fonts to assign certain codes, concepts and categories to the text with codes being keywords or short sentences, concepts being interrelationships of codes and categories being interrelationships of concepts” (Stottok, Bergaus & Gorra, 2011, p. 1). Throughout the process of analysis, I bore in mind the theoretical constructs established and described in the previous chapters.

With the purpose of confirming that the findings were strong enough and responded to the research question, I used the triangulation method to confirm the presence and evidence of such patterns in different instruments. Regarding this, Guion, Diehl and McDonald (2011) stated that the results are validated by data triangulation as it “involves using different sources of information in order to increase the validity of a study” (p. 1). In the same line of thought, Thurmond (2001) defined the triangulation process as “the combination of two or more data sources” (p. 1). Having that in mind, I compared data from the instruments to assess their interrelation. Data triangulation allowed me to keep the relevant and repetitive aspects and

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

discard the ones without significant evidence, and establishing the categories and subcategories that responded to the aim of this study.

As stated by Burns (2010), it is important to “scan the data carefully, usually several times over, to see what categories suggest themselves, or ‘emerge’ from the data” (p. 107). In this way, it is possible to validate it to determine the categories. Finally, after narrowing data, I proceeded to create the categories. In other words, “reduce ample/broad raw data into concise data, to establish relations between the objectives of the study” (Thomas, as cited in Nuñez &Tellez, 2012, p. 61). Thus, I established three different categories.

### Research Categories

To conclude the process, on basis of the relevant recurrent aspects, I found three main categories that emerged from the analysis and interpretation after accomplishing the techniques previously described. Each category has different subcategories, as shown in Table 1. In the next section, I will show their connection with my research question and with the corresponding evidence from the instruments and the theory that supports my findings.

<b>Research question</b> How do the development and implementation of worksheets based on role-plays impact sixth grade students' oral fluency?	<b>Research objective</b> To analyze the influence of the implementation of worksheets framed within role-plays on sixth grade students' oral fluency.
<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>SUBCATEGORIES</b>
1. Facilitating students' learning and role-play creation through materials	1.1 Building vocabulary through material: learning at different paces
	1.2 Exploiting materials as a comprehensive tool kit for role play successful creation
2. Exploiting the affordance of Role-Plays	2.1 Gaining confidence through repetition and practice
	2.2 Role-playing successfully: Partnership as a key factor

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

3. Navigating through strategy instruction and language to develop fluency.	3.1 Moving within and beyond language structures to achieve different levels of fluency
	3.2 Expanding scope of influence of strategy instruction for fluency

**Table 1**

**Materials as facilitators for students' learning and creation.** In an attempt to design appealing materials, I bore in mind creating a positive effect on students' motivation in contrast to the opposite result of the use of textbooks and their lack of appropriateness for students and teachers' expectations, mentioned by Núñez & Téllez (2008). The implementation of these materials was a new experience for students, as they chose the topics during the needs analysis survey at the beginning of the process. As a researcher, I verified the abilities they needed to work on through the class observation. The materials presented several components that gradually took students to a creative process. Performing these activities yielded a positive atmosphere in which students learned many things in short time and put them into practice in a final task.

This main construct concerned my research inquiry as it showed the positive impact of designing suitable materials to favor students' learning process, as explained through the following subcategories: a) *Building vocabulary through the material: learning at different paces*; b) *Materials: a comprehensive tool kit for role-play successful creation*.

***Building vocabulary through the material: learning at different paces.*** Learning a language implies time, effort and teacher and students' willingness to work together within a positive class atmosphere in which they can integrate language skills to communicate. However, learning vocabulary is the foundation to start the process of acquiring a language. In this sense, Kramer, Ketsman and Masmaliyeva (2009) stated:

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

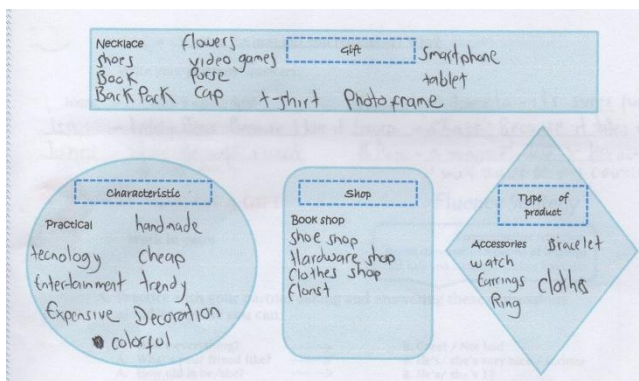
Vocabulary is central to the learning and teaching of a second language as it affords learners access to all forms of oral and written communication that includes literature, music, and content knowledge. Word knowledge is power as words serve as building blocks to learning...One of the major roles of the teacher then becomes to assist students to learn vocabulary as well as to equip them with strategies for learning words. (p. 1)

These authors highlighted the role of vocabulary in the language learners' process, as they need to use words to convey their ideas when participating in different contexts. They also underlined the teacher's role as a facilitator of the learning process. Accordingly, I designed diverse activities in the worksheets through which students used vocabulary in different ways to accomplish the final speaking activity: role-play.

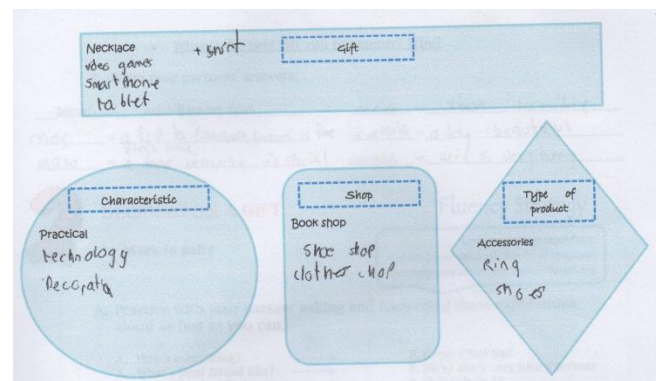
Having in mind that a single teacher usually has a group with different individuals who think, act and learn in a diverse way, it is pertinent to go deeper to identify individual differences that affect the vocabulary learning. Apparently, the type of cognitive process in which the learner is engaged determines learning (Restrepo, 2015). In this sense, teachers expect students to learn vocabulary in a different manner, and at a different pace, depending on those cognitive processes to which the author referred. Regarding vocabulary learning, Schmitt and Schmitt (1995) expressed that "mental activities which require more elaborate thought, manipulation or processing of a new word will help in the learning of that word" (p. 135). Such manipulation of vocabulary was observed during the implementation of the material, as it provided opportunities to manage the vocabulary through different activities. They intended to help students learn new words, which was beneficial for them during the work with the material and in the creation of the role-play.

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

Regarding the manipulation of vocabulary mentioned above, students' prior knowledge was one of the aspects observed along the implementation of the material. In this regard, Glisan and Shrum (2005) stated that inferring prior knowledge and personal background usually help learners interpret meaning. This fact influenced the way students advanced on the vocabulary exercises, and then its use. To illustrate, the following excerpt from the artifacts in the first worksheet shows the way two different students classify vocabulary from a list provided. It was the very first exercise related to vocabulary:



(Artifact, Worksheet 1.)



(Artifact, Worksheet 1)

The student's artifact on the left shows that she completed the exercise of classification successfully; she recognized the words from the list and put them in the categories with no difficulty. The student with the exercise on the right, on the opposite, found more difficult this classification and could not complete it within the time given. The prior vocabulary knowledge guaranteed some students advance faster and more easily in the development of the worksheets. Also, they had opportunities to learn more complex vocabulary since they already knew the basic one. The following excerpt from the field notes confirms this fact, since the experience related to

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vocabulary was different for each student, considering their previous vocabulary and their ability to retain new one:

Some students completed the classification exercise in a very short time, and asked only few questions to me (they are the students who usually do well in the English class, and have good vocabulary). Others found it difficult to understand the instructions, and after clarifying them, they started the exercise. However, they took a lot of time and did not complete the activity. They asked a lot of questions about the items in the list. Surprisingly, some of the questions refer to very basic vocabulary. (*Field notes, Worksheet 1*)

Some students asked only once about difficult or uncommon words, and used them along the worksheet (Ex. Hardware shop, trendy, etc.). Other students asked several times questions about the same words. (Ex. Purse, necklace, expensive, etc.)

After the first approach to the material, which was rich in vocabulary, students showed their perception about it. The following excerpt exemplifies this aspect: on the one hand, the first student showed he had previous vocabulary and it helped him; on the other hand, the second student expressed what she thought about the amount of vocabulary in the worksheet:

Teacher: How did you feel or how was your experience about vocabulary in the previous session?

Student: "I felt good because I knew the vocabulary".

Student: "It was a lot of vocabulary (while shaking her head)" (*Field notes, Worksheet 1*)

Students with higher English level practiced known words and increased their new vocabulary. They felt confident during the implementation because their repertoire allowed them to understand the instructions and to develop some of the activities faster. For other students, it was not easy to face material with vocabulary that they did not know before certain exercises. Additionally, it was evident how much effort they made when learning and adapting new vocabulary during the implementation of material. In one case, a student recognized that her lack

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of vocabulary did not help her advance in the development of the exercises proposed in the material:

Teacher: How was your experience with the material and the vocabulary?

Student: "I think I did well, but in some questions I did stuck sometimes, writing them; because of the word order and because I don't have good vocabulary". (*Interview*)

The difficulty or ease that students faced while working with exercises related to vocabulary shows that each one of them learned and applied vocabulary in a different form and pace. The time used by these two groups of students is also evident regarding the different learning and use of vocabulary they had during the implementation of the material.

At the end of the implementation of the material, students evaluated their process regarding some aspects: one of them was vocabulary. The chart shown below is a summary of the answers of the 12 participants, in which they ranked their application of vocabulary learned through the worksheets to the role-play (being 1 the lowest and 5 the highest):

SELF- ASSESSMENT. Role Plays	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12
-I applied the vocabulary and expressions in the role plays.	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	5	5	4	5	4

(*Artifacts, Self Assessment summary*)

**Table 2**

The numbers students assigned to the statement proposed showed that all of them applied the vocabulary learned, but they did it in a different level. It is possible to see three different numbers: 5, 4 and 3. The students who assigned 3 were the ones that had difficulties regarding vocabulary along the implementation.

The information presented in this subcategory shows the importance of the role of vocabulary and its different learning pace depending on the students taking into account aspects



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as their prior vocabulary knowledge and individual differences. The next subcategory describes materials as a facilitator for the role-play.

***Materials, a comprehensive tool kit for role-play successful creation.*** Preparation for role-play was challenging for students, as it implied several factors such as understanding the situation to role-play, using the necessary vocabulary and following instructions, among other aspects. Materials supported students during all the process, providing the tools they needed for the role-play as a final product after working hard during some sessions in every worksheet. The material introduced useful parts that helped students getting prepared and allowed them to feel more comfortable while getting ready for the activity. This methodological aspect had the purpose of guiding students throughout the process so they could gain confidence. In this sense, this subcategory is featured by the SLA principles expressed by Tomlinson (2011) in relation to the development of confidence through the materials. Students felt they could rely on the models and different components provided along each worksheet.

The material implemented kept a balance between two aspects. On the one hand, it guided students by giving them enough models and instructions for the task. In this sense, Underhill (1987) asserted that “the learner is given a set of instructions... that explain in simple language exactly what he is supposed to do” (p. 51). Similarly, Harmer (1989) referred to the importance of allowing students know exactly what the situation to role-play is, as well as the contextual information. To illustrate the previous idea, I present the following pieces of evidence in which students and teacher expressed their perception and observation towards materials as providers of tools for their role-play creation:

Teacher: ‘What were the advantages of the materials?’

Student: “We could use the key words”

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Student: “(The advantages were) the role play cards and the key words”

Student: “Fluency strategies” (was an advantage). (Survey)

Student: “The ‘role-play cards’ were helpful otherwise we wouldn’t have known how to do the role-play”.

Student: “The material gave us strategies”

Student: “The material gave us the vocabulary that we needed” (Interview)

Teacher: “While making the role-plays, I noticed that students went back on the material and used some vocabulary and expressions proposed, as well as some strategies, parts of the conversation model”. (*Field diaries*)

The segments mentioned by students allowed them to feel more relaxed when they knew how to approach an exercise of this nature. It coincides with another SLA principle that Tomlinson (2011) described as materials helping students feel at ease. During the implementation, they felt more relaxed being aware that the material guided them before and along the process of creating the role-plays.

On the other hand, materials allowed students to use their creativity in their role-plays, personalizing their experience and selecting what they wanted to say following the guidelines of a format given. For Brown (2014), the role-play “frees students to be somewhat creative in their linguistic output” (p. 174). Harmer coincides with this assertion when he expressed regarding role-plays that “we will allow them (students) to be as creative as possible” (p. 352). During the implementation of the material, students could actually use their own ideas and make their role-play to be as similar as what they would act in their real life.

This fact is a piece of evidence of another SLA principle that Tomlinson (2011) referred to when he said that materials should “stimulate intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional involvement” (p. 83). Along the worksheets, it was possible for students to talk about their own ideas and personal experiences when performing the exercises proposed while creating their role-play. I will present some excerpts in which the two aspects mentioned above are evident: a) the material providing strategies for the role-play through vocabulary, expressions, and strategies,

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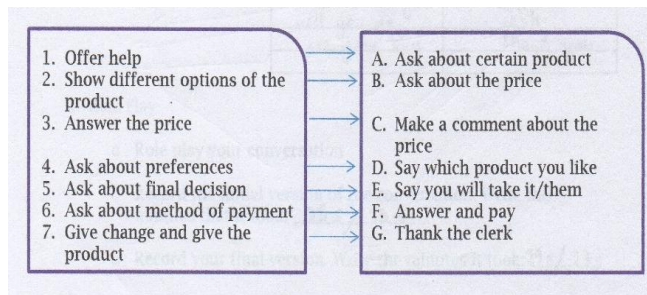
among others, and found in the material and used in the role-plays); and b) the creativity as an outcome of the materials during their role-plays. Additionally, I will present the component joining the two aspects previously described and considered by students as advantages, the role-play card:

Materials guiding students: expressions suggested found in the role-plays.	Creativity that students showed after the work with the worksheets in the role-plays
<p>Hi, how are you? Good, <u>how's everything?</u></p> <p>Hey, <u>what's going on?</u> Hi, I don't see you in much time.</p> <p>Hey men; <u>how can I help you?</u> I need to buy some toys.</p> <p>Hi Juan Diego, it's great to see you. <u>What are you up to?</u> I'm going to see a movie with my friends.</p> <p>Ok. <u>How is everything going?</u> Not bad. Wow, <u>I haven't seen you for some years.</u></p>	<p>Okey, or <u>there is a puppy?</u> Oh, yeah. That's cute.</p> <p>He likes videogames, sports and movies <u>A ball of basketball or a new video game</u></p> <p>Hello, can I help you? Yes, I am looking for a videogame Yes, <u>there are 3. PSP, P3 and Xbox one.</u> Ok, but it is a little expensive.</p> <p>Or <u>you can give a x-box or shoes.... Better that a t-shirt, or you can give the Barca t-shirt.</u> Juandi loves football and the sport.</p> <p>Hi, may I help you? Yes, I looking for a book. <u>I have action, fantasy, and novel book.</u></p> <p>You can buy a nice book cheaper or a volleyball ball but it's too expensive, or you can <u>buy a nice comic</u> She likes reading, listening to music, things like that <u>You can buy a beautiful headphones or an amazing book.</u></p> <p>I'm going to the pet shop. Wow, I haven't seen you for some time. You look awesome Thanks, really. <u>I'm buying clothes to all my family.</u> I'm in a rush.</p> <p>How is your family? Great, thank you. <u>You tell me that you play piano, can we form a band, bye.</u></p> <p>Ok, that's awesome...what we going to do? <u>We can play xbox 360, play soccer, eat ice cream</u></p>

*(Transcripts audio recordings, Worksheets 1,2,3,4)*

**Table 3**

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E. Plan a script for the role play where you buy a gift that you want. Use the vocabulary and expressions that you consider necessary.

1. Hi! How may I help you?	A. I'm looking for a soccer ball.
2. We have three sizes of basketballs of red.	B. I want to see that one. How much is it?
3. It's only \$20 dollars.	C. It's a little too expensive.
4. I recommend you the basketball ball. It's so nice.	D. Thank you, I'll take it.
5. How will you pay?	E. I'll pay cash.
6. Here, and thank you for your buy.	F. Thank you.
7.	G.

*(Artifact, Worksheet 1, role-play card and script)*

As explained and illustrated by the theory and pieces of evidence presented above, the material along the process provided a series of tools for students to succeed in the creation in their role-plays. Besides, the materials motivated students' creativity, since it allowed them to use their experiences, likes, thoughts, among other personal issues.

This category presented the benefits of the materials, and the way students perceived their advantages evinced in the elaboration of their role-plays. In the next category, I go deeper on the analysis of the role-plays, and the factors that allowed students to make them possible.

**Exploiting the affordances of Role-plays.** Brown (1993) described how learners experience different feelings such as tension, anxiety produced by any speaking situation. That is why speaking in class can become stressful for students. The same author (2007) referred to affective factors when he stated that "one of the major obstacles learners have to overcome in learning to speak is the anxiety generated over the risks of blurting things out that are wrong, stupid or incomprehensible" (p. 324). Role-plays allowed students to have some preparation and previous rehearsal for the speaking activities and turn to be a useful technique for working with speaking skills.

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This category presents the factors that made working with role-plays possible in terms of confidence, approach and partnership. It was the first time students had a formal process to perform role-plays, and getting aware of the implications, represented in the subcategories presented below.

***Gaining confidence through repetition and practice.*** Materials based on role-plays, and role-plays themselves were new for students; and the fact of recording them while performing added some complexity to the process. This required dedication and time from students when preparing and performing it as well. As Brown (2004) stated, “In some versions, role play allows some rehearsal time so that students can map out what they are going to say. And it has the effect of lowering anxieties” (p. 174). The students perceived this aspect as an advantage, since they could prepare to face the challenge of recording themselves. For Bailey (2005), “In a role-play or simulation, people have the chance to try it again –to ‘rewind the tape’, so to speak-and redo the interaction with improvements, an opportunity we seldom have in real life” (p. 137). Despite students did not perceive the fact of being recorded as a positive experience, they did, regarding the opportunity to prepare the role-play by writing it in the role-play-script and then practicing it as many times as possible. Therefore, they could feel more confident to record it. These ideas appear as examples in the following excerpts from the instruments:

Student: “After you write it (the role-play), you know what to say” [sic]

***(Interview)***

Teacher: “students worked faster on the scripts after getting used to them. In each worksheet, students used less time for this section” [sic]

***(Field Notes, Worksheet 3).***

Teacher: “(In the last worksheet) students seem much more confident at the moment of practicing and recording. Most of them try to keep away the script from their sight, compared to the previous worksheets”. [sic]

***(Field Notes, Worksheet 4)***

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Teacher: "The time dedicated for each worksheet as well as the recording time decreased progressively; the last worksheet was completed in half time of the first one" [*sic*]

(*Field Notes, Worksheet 4*).

Student: "Having written and recorded the dialogue helped me to improve my English level"

Student: "The worksheets contributed due to the fact that I practiced so much, so I improved" [*sic*] (*Survey*)

Student: "The role play helped me to be more confident with myself, not to get stuck that much, and practice speaking much faster". [*sic*]  
(*Survey*)

After some experience of working with the materials and the role-plays, students felt more confident and took less time compared to the previous versions in the same worksheet, and the subsequent ones. Besides preparing, they practiced what they would say, they felt more comfortable and could notice certain mistakes and made corrections for the versions to record.

The following chart presents one example of the time in seconds used by a student in the different role-plays along the worksheets, each one with different versions recorded:

Worksheets- Role-plays	Version 1	Version 2	Version 3	Version 4
W1- Role-play 1	59s	37s	31s	37s
W1- Role-play 2	33s	38s	28s	24s
W2- Role-play 1	29s	34s	27s	30s
W2- Role-play 2	28s	27s	23s	25s
W3- Role-play 1	31s	29s	24s	32s
W3- Role-play 2	21s	19s	23s	21s
W4- Role-play 1	21s	18s	19s	16s
W4- Role-play 2	18s	18s	17s	16s

(*Summary of seconds in recordings, Student 10*)

**Table 4**

Progressively, most students appeared more confident when speaking in the recordings. It included fewer pauses, fewer hesitations and false starts, and in general a more friendly, relaxed and natural tone of voice. Students showed lower level of anxiety. The following excerpts show the contrast between the initial role-play and one of the final ones performed by a student:

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Worksheet 1, role-play 1, version 1	Worksheet 4, roe-play 2, version 4
A: Hello, you know that Friday is the birthday # of my/ best friend? B: ... And/ what is the gift/ for her? A: I don't know/ what is the gift. B: //What she likes? A: She likes accessories, animals and play tennis. B: Why// gift tennis racket? A: ... Where /can/ I /get/ it? B: At tennis shop/ or/ in sport shop. A: //Thanks/ for # your/ ideas. B: No problem, good bye. [ <i>sic</i> ] <b>(Audio recording transcript, Worksheet 1)</b> ... (False starts) # (Hesitation) / (Unnecessary pause) // (Longer unnecessary pause)	A: Hello Isa, do you like the movie? B: Yes, I loved it, and you like the movie? A: Yes, the movie is very interesting B: Yeah, they're excellent. A: // and you like the end? B: Yes, but the actors is incredible. A: Yes, all the movie is incredible. B: Yes, you have the reason. [ <i>sic</i> ] <b>(Audio recording transcription, Worksheet 3)</b>

**Table 5**

In the role-play on the left, it was possible to identify a number of false starts, hesitation and unnecessary pauses, marked with the symbols above mentioned. Although students memorized the role-play, some aspects indicated lack of confidence, and the necessity of practicing more. After this process, the same students demonstrated some level of progress shown with no evidence of false starts and unnecessary pauses in the role-play on the right. It may have relation with confidence gained through the repetition and practice during the role-play performed and recorded.

This subcategory illustrated how practice and repetition helped students gain confidence in their role-plays performance; it was exemplified with data from instruments over the implementation. The next subcategory refers to the importance of partnership in the process of preparing and performing the role-plays.

***Partnership: a key factor on role-play success.*** Role-play implied working in pairs during the implementation of the worksheets designed. Brown (2007) referred to this aspect

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stating that, "One learners' performance is always colored by that of the person (interlocutor) he or she is talking with" (p. 325). Partnership resulted to be a relevant aspect that determined successful creation and performance of the role-plays. Besides, it created an environment of confidence for students to work on their role-plays. Despite friendship sometimes yielded distractions, they were able to manage the situation. Throughout the four worksheets, students had the opportunity to work with close friends as a pair, and with classmates who were not very close to them. The observation of this work with different pairs became evident in this subcategory, as well as the information taken from other instruments.

Teacher: "While assigning students their pair to work in the second worksheet, some them refused to work with other students who were not their friends" (*Field Notes*)

Teacher: What would you change from the work with role-play worksheets?

Student: "To have the opportunity to choose our partners". (*Survey*)

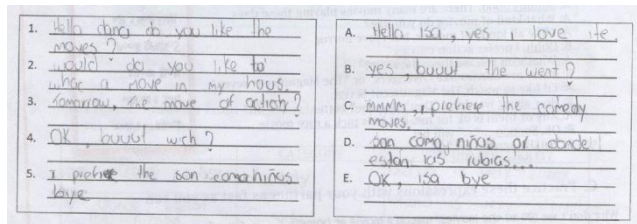
The last pieces of evidence present some students' attitude that limited pair work at some level, since they really preferred to work with persons who were familiar to them and with similar personal and academic characteristics. In addition, they highlighted partnership when selecting partners to work with, bearing in mind the success of their experience.

To illustrate the fact previously described, I will present the role-plays performed by a student and her best friend while working on the third worksheet, contrasting it with her performance in the fourth one with a classmate who was not very close to her. In the third worksheet, she worked well and created excellent role-plays with her friend; both tried to pronounce words clearly, making the necessary pauses, and in general, there was a friendly mood during the audio. They recorded each role-play eight times while working together. She had a different attitude while working with another pair during the fourth worksheet. Her voice did not sound as friendly as it did while working with her friend, and the conversation was



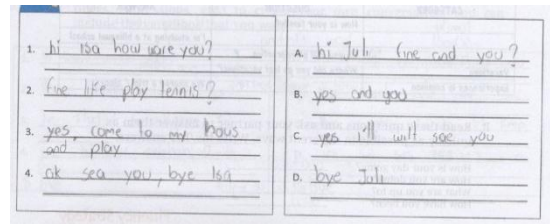
## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

shorter; besides, she expressed very short sentences. Additionally, they recorded the role-play only five times. This situation shows less effective pace. The following pieces of evidence show the contrast between this student and her two pairs in the first and second worksheet.



[sic]

**(Artifact, Role-play script, Worksheet 3)**



[sic]

**(Artifact, Role-play, Worksheet 4)**

The difference between the two role-plays demonstrates the feasible variations that an interactional exercise can have, depending on partnership. The variations in this case refer to extension, use of wide vocabulary, intonation, length of sentences, among others. Students were willing to talk about partners along the process of the implementation of materials. They concluded that it does not matter the English level as much as the attitude of the person who works with you:

Student: "Sometimes when you work with a person, that person doesn't pay attention to you, talks to his friends and you end up doing everything". [sic]

**(Interview)**

Student: "Also depend on the attitude that you and your partner have. If you have a good attitude, but your partner doesn't want to do anything, he transmits that and when you're going to do the task, you don't do it with energy". [sic]

**(Interview)**

This constitutes evidence that partnership also determines students' success in their role-play, and aspects as willingness, concentration, and good attitude, among others, that count in the moment of working together to accomplish a speaking activity (in this case, role-plays). As

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Hughes (2010) stated, one “aim of materials to teach speaking should be to help learners understand that effective speaking skills are based on a collaboration between language users” (p. 209). Students could reflect on this aspect based on the experience that they had while working with different persons. Observing the importance of partnership in the role-play activities allowed me to establish its crucial role during the implementation of the material. On basis of Brown’s (2001) view:

The greatest difficulty that learners encounter in attempts to speak is not the multiplicity of sounds, words, phrases, and discourse forms that characterize any language, but rather the interactive nature of most communication. Conversations are collaborative as participants engage in a process of negotiation of meaning. (p. 322)

This category showed the affordance of role-plays related to confidence through practice and the role of partnership for role-play success. The next category shows how strategies helped the development of fluency.

**Navigating through strategy instruction and language to develop fluency.** The nature of speaking makes it “something of a ‘high-risk’ business for all speakers, and particularly for the second language users”. (Hughes, 2010, p. 208). Participants faced a great challenge with speaking skills, and followed a long path to develop certain level of fluency, which was the micro-skill mainly worked through role-plays. It was not an easy task, but there were interesting findings observed during the process through the different instruments managed. Two important aspects found concern fluency and its development: first, the way students paid attention (or not) to the language structures; how it shaped their fluency, and second, the role of strategies and the way students implemented them. The excerpt below explains these categories.

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*Moving within and beyond structure to achieve different levels of fluency.* The structures and grammatical aspects weighed during the planning and performance of role-plays. However, they did not have the same degree of relevance for students. In some cases, some students intended to pay more attention to accuracy, and others paid more attention to fluency. Brown (2001) expressed the role of accuracy and fluency in CLT, showing the importance of both elements in speaking skills, but mentioning fluency as an initial aspect to develop. Both aspects, fluency and intended accuracy (in terms of grammar and structures), were observed through the application of different instruments. The following excerpt shows how students approached the work with the materials and elaboration of role-plays regarding structures:

“Students with low English level asked a lot of questions about vocabulary and structures. On the contrary, some students with higher English level asked few questions, and usually planed, practiced and recorded the audio faster. They didn't pay much attention to grammatical aspects”.  
[sic]

*(Field Notes)*

The contrast between these two kinds of students shows their difference regarding the level of difficulty in terms of vocabulary and structures. Additionally, students with higher knowledge of English language seemed to be not very interested in grammatical constructions and it could lead to a faster preparation of the role-plays. For instance, the following excerpt shows how these two students paid more attention to the message than to the structure they were using (it was possible to notice their intention to speak fast):

More focus on fluency	More focus on language structures
So .... The playdate is coming Saturday There, <u>what gona do then</u> ? Well, I suppose we will eat pizza I love it, what about the games? We can play soccer or something like that. Alright and in door we can play video games, I suppose. Ok, <u>do you call of duty</u> ? Yes, is my favorite videogame	Hi, do you have / a / present to a woman? Yes, I have Can I see / it? Yes, we have different colors and size Good. They / are / some very beautiful. How much / is / it? 100US It's so / very expensive It's on sale. How may I help you? I like this one

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

<p>I feel like swim  No way, I'm very .... [sic]  <i>(Recording transcript, Role-play, Worksheet 3).</i></p>	<p>It's 25US. You pay with credit or cash?  Cash  Ok [sic]  <i>(Recording transcript, Role-play, Worksheet 1)</i></p>
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**Table 6**

The students on the right paid more attention to avoiding pauses and speaking as fast as they could. The student on the right clearly expressed low interest in showing fluency during the role-play. Instead, he preferred to pay more attention to aspects such as structure and pronunciation:

It was the opposite in my case (speak fast)... I was a little slower, but I tried to pronounce better, and it was ok. [sic]  
*(Interview, student 9)*

"it (the work with role-plays) affected moreover in how you say the phrases, let's say present simple, and also in the written part". [sic]  
*(Interview, student 9)*

Observing the previous pieces of evidence, it is possible to notice how some students managed the language in terms of structures (following the grammatical rules), or went further, (paying attention to other different aspects such as fluency).

To confirm the aspects presented in the subcategory, I considered some speaking skills that Brown (2007) suggested to "focus on both fluency and accuracy, depending on your objective" (p. 331). After the implementation of the worksheets and the analysis of data, it is possible to say that students also learned according to their aims; in this way, some students seemed to be more concerned about language correctness, whereas others were about maintaining a suitable interaction pace.

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This subcategory presented fluency as result in some cases as a clear intention to develop it, deviating attention from grammatical aspects. The following subcategory describes how strategy played an important role regarding the development of fluency.

***Expanding scope of influence of strategy instruction for fluency.*** Students found different fluency strategies along the materials and they perceived their importance. Bailey (2005) explained that people face obstacles when trying to convey an idea as they lack of vocabulary or grammatical structures. For this reason, they use “communication strategies – verbal and/or nonverbal procedures for compensating for gaps in speaking competence” (p. 19). The students took advantage of these strategies provided through the materials, as evinced below.

“when checking the scripts they’re creating, I see that many of them are using the strategies suggested, as well as the vocabulary and expressions shown in the worksheets”.  
[sic]

### ***(Field Notes)***

While transcribing the audio recordings, this use of strategies was confirmed; in the case of several students, they stretched words out, used fixed conversational formats, vague language, among others. This fact determined part of the success in the speaking task; this means, in the role-plays. Moreover, it helped students in some cases have certain level of fluency. These are some evidences that support the previous affirmations:

Stretch words out and use fillers to avoid silence	Fixed conversational formats Affirmation + Question Answer + extra question	Vague language
Buuuuut... Okeeeey  Ohhhh.. Sooooo, Ahhhh Like Ok	How did you like the movie? It was awesome, did you like it? Yes, it was interesting, do you like the actors? Yes, the best is Adam Sandler and about the end, did you like it? Yes, I liked it. It was cool. Rate the movie. Ok, I gived it an 8 and you? I gived it an 9	Well... Something like that I suppose No way

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

Ehhh		
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[sic] (*Transcripts audio recordings, Worksheets 1,2,3,4, different students*)

**Table 7**

Besides using different strategies presented in the material, some students went further the suggested ones, proposing new ones that allowed them to create their own style to increase fluency. Thornbury (2005) referred to this fact as “tricks or production strategies” that speakers use in order to create “illusion of fluency” (p.7). For instance, one student created personal strategies, such as improvisation, use of synonyms, overuse of existing strategies (fixed formats= double question). It demonstrated that, in addition to using the strategies suggested, students implement different ones. While speaking, another student repeated words to avoid silence, considered as a personal strategy. A different participant improvised non-planned expressions like “see you” and “good luck”. She also implemented the strategy of repeating while rephrasing what she was saying. It avoided silence too. All those strategies, the suggested and the ones created by students are pieces of evidence of their important role in the process to develop fluency in participants in this study. The pieces of evidence will be appear in the following charts

Role-play planned	Role-play performed and recorded (Improvisation)
Hey men; how can I help you? I need to buy some toys. ... But is so specific, there is something cheaper? ... Oh, yeah. That's cute. ... Okay. No problem, I give you the money. No, there is a problem... just credit card Okay, but there is a sale of credit Thanks for buying Ok. Bye ( <i>Artifact, role-play, worksheet 1, student 1</i> )	Hey men; how are you? Good, thanks for asking. ... It's a little expensive ... Oh, yeah. That's perfect. ... Come here and in the box you will buy it I wish you can play with the x-box Ok, thank you for shopping, bye ( <i>Transcript role-play, worksheet 1, student 1</i> )

**Table 8**

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

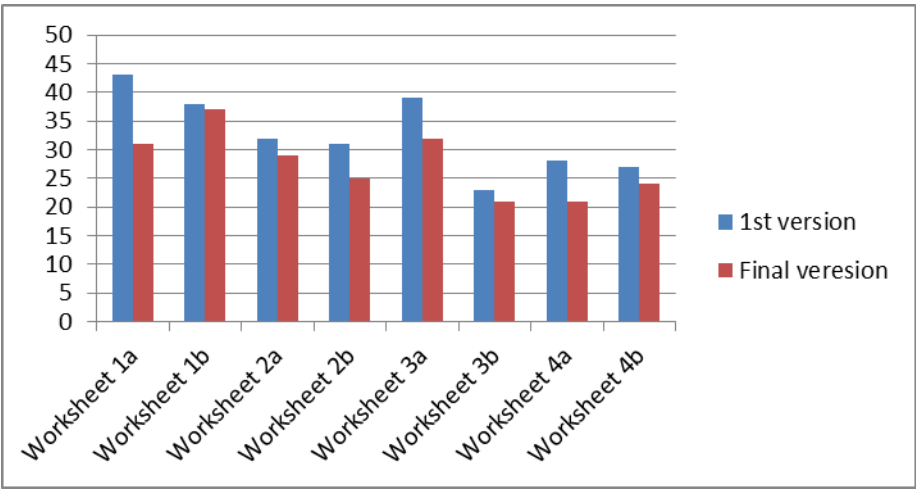
Strategy created	Evidence
Use of synonyms	That's so <u>good</u> , and <u>fine</u> It's a <u>nice</u> or <u>good</u> idea. ( <i>Transcript audio recording, Worksheet 2</i> )
Overuse of existing strategies (fixed formats= double question)	It was so interesting. <u>Do you like the actors</u> and <u>what was your favorite?</u> Yes, I liked so much the actors. My favorite was Adam Sandler, and how about the end? ( <i>Transcript audio recording, Worksheet 3</i> )
Repeat words to avoid silence	<u>I'm</u> . <u>I'm</u> playing soccer <u>That's</u> , <u>that's</u> ok, bye It's <u>good</u> , it's <u>good</u> ( <i>Transcript audio recording, Worksheet 2</i> )
Improvised expressions	Expressions not planned in the script: See you later Good luck ( <i>Transcript audio recording, Worksheet 2</i> )
Repeating while rephrasing	I <u>will</u> talk, I <u>will</u> like to talk to you... ( <i>Transcript audio recording, Worksheet 2</i> )

**Table 9**

Evidence of fluency was also observed in the transcripts of recordings during the process of analyzing the data; it was done by contrasting the definition that an author gives and the students' performance. The factors that Thornbury (2005) summarizes are the following: a) Pauses may be long but not frequent, b) Pauses are usually filled, c) Pauses occur at meaningful transition points, e) There are long runs of syllables and words between pauses.

The chart that summarizes how students could speak faster while using some strategies suggested, and the way they presented their personal ones. It shows the seconds students took for their role-plays in each one of the role-plays. It is possible to observe that the first versions were usually longer than the next ones, and the three last role-plays were shorter than the rest.

ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS’ FLUENCY



**Table 10**

From the previous analysis, it is important to remember key aspects arising from it. First, developing materials has great benefits for students, as it provides tools for them to succeed in language challenges. Second, role-plays enhance pair, group interaction, teamwork, and partnership; practice leads students to increase confidence as well. Finally, instructing students on specific learning strategies helps students understand the way they learn and administer knowledge by being able to apply suggested and create new strategies.

The present chapter described in detail the data analysis accomplished and the categories that emerged from such process. Furthermore, the evidence from the instruments presented, as well as the theory that supported findings connected with the experience as a materials developer, researcher and teacher. The following chapter presents the conclusions and pedagogical implications, which summarize the most important aspects found after the research process. Additionally, it portrays the limitations of my study and the possible questions for future research.



## Chapter V

### Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

This chapter comprises the conclusions and implications after accomplishing the research process to answer the research question established: How do the development and implementation of worksheets based on role-plays impact sixth graders' fluency? It describes the pedagogical implications for the EFL community, my students, the school and I as a teacher, researcher and materials developer, and the limitations found along the process of this study, and some possible research questions for future research.

#### Conclusions

Speaking as a language skill has been explored in depth by researchers along the history of language teaching, considering that this ability allows people to communicate, interact with others and express their thought. As Hughes (2010) expressed, "Speaking is a unique form of communication which is the basis of all human relationships and the primary channel for projection and development of individual identity" (p. 208). In this case, working with students from sixth grade at Gimnasio Los Andes allowed me to observe obstacles and, at the same time, increase my interest in enhancing this ability. The implementation of worksheets based on role-plays created learning opportunities, in which students' experience as English learners was enriched, as they were exposed for the first time to formal work with role-play materials. This implementation had a positive impact on students in different ways, and valuable aspects observed after analyzing data collected from the different instruments.

Materials were facilitators of students' learning and role-play creation; a positive impact was observed related students' learning progress due to the design on suitable materials. During the work with such materials, vocabulary learning and use was an important factor. On the one

## ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

hand, for some of my students understanding vocabulary and then using it while creating role-plays was not always easy. On the other hand, some students managed to use prior vocabulary along the worksheets and learned new one faster than the first group of students. The materials allowed every participant to build vocabulary; however, it happened at different paces and levels.

Materials also allowed students to be prepared for the role-play creation and performance, which they perceived as the great final product of their work with the materials. Students recognized materials as a tool for them to create their role-play successfully. Among the aspects that helped them, they mentioned the strategies provided, the role-play cards, and the possibility to use key words, among others. The materials were highly beneficial for students, featured by the principles of second language acquisition, as Nuñez, Téllez and Castellanos expressed it:

Giving clear instructions, making strategies explicit, balancing and organizing pre and post activities, providing variety of activities, delaying activities for constructing knowledge or engaging in very complex activities, and including communicative activities appropriate for students' current language performance/command of English.

(as cited in Ramos & Aguirre, 2014)

Regarding role-plays, exploiting their affordance emerged as a category that formalized interesting findings. Role-playing allowed students to gain confidence through repetition and practice. Despite it was not always an interesting task for students, repetition generated a positive result in their performance of the role-plays. As Harmer (2006) asserted, "Repetition has always played a part in language learning... students also seem to gain from repeating tasks" (p. 56).

Partnership, observed as a relevant aspect while working with role-plays, became a crucial factor for students, and depending on how they felt with their partner, it interfered with the outcome of the activity. Their reluctance to work with a person who was not a good friend

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shows how important partnership was for them. Indeed, pairs who were very close friends performed excellent role-plays. For Johnson (1995), “student-student interaction has the potential to play an important role not only in shaping the patterns of communication in second language classrooms but in creating opportunities for students to use language for classroom learning and second language acquisition” (p. 117). These benefits increase when such interaction takes place among students who are already familiar to one other.

The last findings concerned fluency, since it was the core aspect during the implementation of the role-play worksheets. Students went through a long path to develop some level of fluency and they were able to observe, in some cases, the change in this characteristic of their speaking ability. As Harmer (2006) expressed, “Role-play can be used to encourage general oral fluency” (p. 352). Such fluency could be observed through two interesting aspects: the first one concerning the language structures, and the second regarding the strategies.

In the first aspect, students worked with structures; others went further. The first group of students paid special attention to grammatical aspects, and the second group focused more on the message itself leaving aside language structures. This difference helped the second group develop more fluency, and in the first one, it delayed it, not meaning that it was not developed.

Complementing the previous subcategory, explicit instruction of fluency strategies and implementation was the second aspect observed. Its influence allowed students to develop their fluency, as they applied the strategies suggested. Additionally, some of the participants created their own strategies, which worked perfectly for making fluent role-plays. This last finding is related to Brown's (2001) reflection referring to strategic competence as a difficult aspect to develop by students; such competence connects to the accomplishment of oral communicative

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purposes by developing own personal strategies. Some of the participants in this study showed the creation of those kinds of strategies, which helped the improvement of fluency.

In sum, it is posible to say that the pedagogical intervention had a positive impact on students' learning process in terms of language development and intrinsic aspects, such as motivation, confidence and partnership. The main findings showed that investing time on designing materials builds up new ways of teaching and improves the classroom environment, leading in turn to better language learning experiences.

### **Pedagogical implications**

This study had a significant impact on me as a materials developer, researcher and a teacher. As a material developer, I realized how valuable it is to embark in this challenging task to boost my students' learning process. As a researcher, I learned that a research study requires systematic work to succeed and approach a situation observed; and as a teacher, I became more professional due to the serious commitment involved.

For the students, this study was an opportunity for approaching a speaking skill (fluency) using material developed by a teacher who analysed their needs and took into account their interests. Despite the experience was demanding they made the most of it. The academic community valued the research process that this study implied and continued motivating teachers to become researchers within the classrooms, which enriches not only the teacher and students, but also the institution.

### **Limitations**

Speaking is a challenging skill to develop, and studies that aim at enhancing it in any way present some limitations. In the process of the present study, one of the greatest limitations was related to time, since the institution schedules different activities that sometimes interfered with

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the classes and did not allow teachers to carry out a schedule as it had been planned, affecting the continuity in a specific activity. Another limitation that affected the development of the process was the lack of necessary aids for students to record their role-plays. In occasions, it delayed the process of recording and it was necessary to use more time than the originally planned.

Additionally, the participants depended on the Internet connection to send their recordings, which presented some type of inconvenience.

The last limitation concerned the numerous personal situations that students faced, since their participation in different activities from the school or personal issues made some of them be absent from my sessions. This aspect risked the permanence of such students in the study even when most of them wanted to continue being part of it.

### **Further Research**

Taking into account the study presented in this document, I hope more colleagues become interested in accomplishing research in the future. Accordingly, I propose to the following questions:

What impact does the implementation of role-play worksheets have on students' accuracy?

What impact does the implementation of role-play worksheets have on students' pronunciation?

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# ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Needs assessment survey

Universidad  
**Externado**  
de Colombia

MAESTRÍA EN EDUCACIÓN

ENCUESTA

Queridos estudiante,

Para mejorar nuestras clases de inglés, y como parte de información para un Proyecto de Investigación, amablemente te solicito responder esta encuesta. Siéntete libre de ser completamente honesto en tus respuestas, ya que la encuesta no es parte del proceso académico formal. Tu participación es completamente voluntaria.

Muchas gracias.

Marca con una X tu respuesta (más de una es posible):

1. ¿Cómo consideras tu nivel inglés con respecto a tu habilidad oral?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Excelente
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bueno
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Promedio
<input type="checkbox"/>	Necesito mejorar

2. ¿Qué piensas acerca de las actividades orales en las clases de inglés? Ellas son... (más de una respuesta es posible)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Divertidas
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Interesantes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Aburridas
<input type="checkbox"/>	Necesarias

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Difíciles
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Fáciles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provechosas
<input type="checkbox"/>	Irrelevantes

3. ¿Qué tan activo eres en las actividades orales en las clases de inglés?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Muy activo
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Activo
<input type="checkbox"/>	Para nada activo

¿Por qué?

soy un poco tímida.

4. Consideras que el desarrollo de "Role plays" fortalece:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Habilidades orales
<input type="checkbox"/>	Conocimiento de la gramática
<input type="checkbox"/>	Adquisición de vocabulario
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Todas las anteriores

# ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

## ENCUESTA

Queridos estudiantes,

Para mejorar nuestras clases de inglés, y como parte de información para un Proyecto de Investigación, amablemente les solicito responder esta encuesta de una manera libre y honesta, ya que esta encuesta no es parte del proceso académico formal. Su participación es completamente voluntaria.

Muchas gracias.

Marca con una X tu respuesta (más de una respuesta es posible):

1. En tu opinión, ¿cuán importante es aprender inglés en el colegio?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Muy importante
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Importante
<input type="checkbox"/>	No es importante
<input type="checkbox"/>	No es importante en absoluto

2. ¿Por qué crees que el aprendizaje del Inglés es una necesidad hoy en día?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Lo exigen en la universidad
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Brinda oportunidades de viajar al extranjero
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Da una ventaja laboral
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ayuda a la comprensión de textos, música, películas en Inglés

3. En general, ¿Cómo ha sido tu experiencia con el inglés en el colegio?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Muy positiva
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Positiva
<input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral
<input type="checkbox"/>	Negativa

4. Para ti, ¿cuáles son las habilidades más difíciles en Inglés?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Escritura
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lectura
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Oral
<input type="checkbox"/>	Escucha

¿Por qué?

facil hablar en

5. Para ti, ¿cuáles son las habilidades más fáciles en Inglés?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Escritura
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lectura
<input type="checkbox"/>	Oral
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Escucha

¿Por qué?

6. ¿En cuanto a la habilidad oral, qué te interesa desarrollar más?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Precisión en los mensajes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Fluidez al hablar
<input type="checkbox"/>	Acento
<input type="checkbox"/>	Todas las anteriores

¿Por qué?



# ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

¿Por qué? y ¿qué otros resultados crees que podrían haber en el desarrollo de "role plays" durante las clases de inglés?

mejorar en la clase de ingles en la parte oral

5. ¿Qué opinión tienes de los Juegos de rol aplicados a las actividades de clase? Ellos son...

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Divertidos
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difíciles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fáciles
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Interesantes

<input type="checkbox"/>	Aburridos
<input type="checkbox"/>	Necesarios
<input type="checkbox"/>	Innecesarios

¿Por qué?

nos ayuda a mejorar en la parte oral mas divertidos

6. En actividades orales (diálogos o juegos de rol), tú prefieres...

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Usar scripts del libro
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Crear mis propios scripts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hablar espontáneamente
<input type="checkbox"/>	Todas las anteriores

7. ¿Qué temas te gustaría que se incluyeran en Juegos de rol?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Selección de un regalo
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hablar acerca de vacaciones
<input type="checkbox"/>	Discutir acerca de comida
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Encontrarse con un amigo
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Planear una cita de juegos
<input type="checkbox"/>	Elegir cursos extracurriculares

¿Cuáles?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. ¿Qué clase de materiales prefieres que se usen en clases de inglés?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Talleres
<input type="checkbox"/>	Libro de texto
<input type="checkbox"/>	Material elaborado por cada estudiante
<input type="checkbox"/>	Otros

¿Cuáles?

\_\_\_\_\_



# ROLE-PLAYS IMPACT ON SIXTH GRADERS' FLUENCY

## Appendix B

### Consent form

Bogotá D.C., 9 de septiembre de 2016



Respetados estudiantes,

Cordialmente me dirijo a ustedes con el fin de solicitarles su colaboración y consentimiento para ser parte de mi proyecto de investigación basado en "Impact of Role Play worksheets students' fluency (Impacto de talleres de juegos de rol en la fluidez de estudiantes)" a través del desarrollo de actividades dentro de la clase, las cuales no representarán una nota académica. Cada participante está en la libertad de retirar su consentimiento de participación en cualquier punto del proceso.

Todo el material escrito y de audio proporcionado por ustedes no será publicado fuera de los intereses de esta investigación y se mantendrá en el anonimato.

Agradezco su atención y colaboración.

Cordialmente,

Milena Munévar Vega

Docente de Inglés

Autorizo mi participación en el proyecto mencionado.

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_ Firma: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Field notes

WORKSHEET Nº3

MOVIE

HOOR	OBSERVATIONS	PERSON	ANALYSIS
W3a	<p>Students received the worksheets and they were a little familiar with the format.</p> <p>In the first exercise (Movie Quiz), they were attentive to the screen, but there were a lot of comments.</p> <p>The place where this part of the worksheet was carried on was very comfortable. Many of them laid on the puffs.</p> <p>For answering the questions, many students answered in a short way. Some of them asked some questions:</p> <p>How do you say: .... They asked about adverbs of frequency and time expressions.</p> <p>When talking about a friend, many of them immediately turn their face to their closest friend. Sometimes they don't even ask the question in a complete way, but say a word: Ex. Romance?</p> <p>C. Remember 2 movies...</p> <p>One student showed a big smile when I told her she could work with a group (because she was alone in that moment).</p> <p>Students used a lot of Spanish during the interaction moments. They ask questions in Spanish to friends, and they turn to English when the teacher tells them to.</p> <p>D. Chart: Movie, Category, Why did you like it?</p>	<p>Ss 8-9</p> <p>S 7</p> <p>Ss 3, 4 Aponte</p>	<p>Students are motivated by interesting topics. If it allow them to remember memories, they speak a lot with their partners.</p> <p>The worksheets have created certain level of confidence in the English class, among the students and teacher.</p> <p>The worksheet allows to build friendship ties, because there are references to some friends' experiences, opinions, etc.</p> <p>Students don't enjoy much working but their own, especially if their level is not very good.</p> <p>Students tend to use Spanish when they seem excited with a topic.</p> <p>Students of high level ask a lot to avoid the use of Spanish</p>